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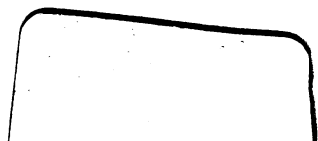
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1. Fiction, English





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W.W.

# Doubting Castle

Elinor Chipp

|

*Then said the shepherds, From that stile there  
goes a path that leads directly to Doubting  
Castle, which is kept by Giant Despair—*

PILGRIM'S PROGRESS

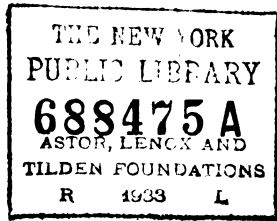
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TO MY FATHER





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# DOUBTING CASTLE

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCING THE BALDWINS, BOTH THE LIVING AND THE DEAD

"I AM the resurrection and the life saith the Lord: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live—" read the clergyman, his voice droning dully through the cemetery chapel.

The dead man lay in his coffin between tall vases of lilies on either hand, a heavy wreath of roses and ivy and quantities of florists' tinfoil weighting down his chest, while his soul went speeding onward through the untrammelled spaces of the Infinite. Only what was mortal of him lay there, unmindful of the candles, of the heavy scent of flowers, of the black-robed people who crowded the place and the good-will showered upon him now that he was dead, as unconscious as he had been in life of the snubs and the slights and the slightly supercilious attitude of the rest of the family towards him.

They sat now grouped in the centre of the chapel in various attitudes of pity or grief or boredom, according to their several natures, but all of them gathered there to do him honour.

"We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away——"

Irene Baldwin, seated beside her husband Richard, stirred restlessly and gazed meditatively at the tips of her black suede gloves. Ugly, they were! A barbaric colour for gloves. A dull resentment against them slowly formulated in her mind.

She was a large woman with brown cow's-eyes, high cheek-bones and a flattish moulding of the features which gave a faintly Slavic cast to her countenance. She had smooth brown hair brushed back from her forehead, a large indeterminate mouth and a small chin. She was just on the hither side of forty, and handsome in a way, although few persons had discovered it, least of all herself. She did not so impress people. She moved slowly, seeming never in a hurry; and there was something heavy about her which, with a certain timidity, and a complaisance which covered the latent energy within her, made her enigmatic.

Her eyes, now searching the chapel in an effort of her mind to divorce itself from the contemplation of the black gloves, fell at length on a girl across the narrow aisle who sat bolt upright gazing straight before her.

Irene watched the girl a trifle timidly for a while; then she nudged her husband.

"Look!" she whispered.

Richard Baldwin followed the direction of her eyes; and he, too, stared at the girl, but without interest.

She was undeniably pretty; a short upper lip which curled outward ever so slightly, a full under one, a short, straight nose, and firm oval chin. She was slender and dark and vital, with a kind of tense eagerness about her from the crown of her head to the tip of her little black boot. Her dark hair was cropped and curled outward over her ears, so that on her head

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sionless, except for her sharp little black eyes and her equally sharp, unpleasant tongue. They were all secretly a little afraid of her.

At first, when John had brought her home a bride, there had been some show of resistance on the part of the family, led and fostered by Letty Baldwin, the eldest woman of the family. But in the end the little intruder had conquered, not with any better weapon than her implacable tongue. When any of the family spoke evil of her, she returned in kind; and she could easily out-do them at that game, as they found to their cost. It was seen that it was better to have her as a friend than as an enemy. Furthermore, after John's death (he had been unusually successful in the City), Mrs. John was known to have an income of at least four thousand pounds, and therefore deserved to have recognition.

So they had shut their ears to the old scandal and had taken her in a measure to themselves. She still lived, twenty years after her husband's death, shut up in her big house in Regent's Park. She sat now beside her sister-in-law, Hildegard Baldwin; and her expression was not one of grief. She had always had a contempt for her brother-in-law, Nathan.

"Lord, let me know mine end, and the number of my days. . . . Behold, Thou hast made my days as it were a span long, and my age is even as nothing in respect to Thee: and verily every man living is altogether vanity——"

The girl in the black dress with the bobbed hair lifted her head ever so slightly, and Simeon Baldwin, who had been watching her covertly from behind his prayer-book, dropped his eyes.

"For man walketh in a vain shadow and disquieteth

himself in vain: he heapeth up riches, and cannot tell who shall gather them——”

The voice of the clergyman trailed on, and the thoughts of the mourners followed their own bent.

Simeon Baldwin was thinking of his speculations in the City, and how the per cents were; and if, after all, that South American investment was a sound one. And beside him Matthew Baldwin was thinking, “Poor Nathan! He never got much out of life. Always timid. Always afraid to venture anything. I suppose it was on account of that weak chest of his. And then that trouble he had——” Matthew’s mind slipped over the dead man’s youth with its heart-break, and rested a trifle scornfully on “that woman he *did* marry.” Inoffensive, perhaps, but not the kind Nathan ought to have married. What he had needed was a manager. Someone to pull him out of the dumps when he got despondent. Someone with spirit, like that Spanish dancer he had been so mad about once.

And then that girl, that daughter of his! A baggage if ever there was one! It did not impress Matthew that the girl had done what her father had not dared to do,—run away with a good-for-nothing adventurer, and a married one at that. Matthew shook his head. Poor Nathan! What a disgrace. And then, as if that hadn’t been enough, he must find her out before she died and bring home her child to live with him.

Her child! A fine disgrace, that! What had he wanted to go trapesing all over Europe for, looking for her? Trying to find out what had become of her, instead of letting her stew in her own juice? Must have been no end trying at his time of life and in his poor health. But that was Nathan all over,—

no resistance at all sometimes, and obstinate as a pig at others. And now Nathan was dead as well as his daughter, and here was the girl. And what was to become of her now?

And he too looked at Gloria Baldwin, Nathan's granddaughter, and blinked at her with his hard, selfish eyes.

"Hold not thy peace at my tears . . . For I am a stranger with thee and a sojourner: as all my fathers were. O spare me a little that I may recover my strength: before I go hence and be no more seen——"

The girl put her hand suddenly to her throat. Something of the dead man's loneliness crept into her being and stabbed her with the pangs of unexpressed sympathy.

Perhaps it reached Aunt Letty too, for she was thinking: "Poor Nathan! How handsome he was when he was young, to be sure. And how attractive! Poor Nathan! Perhaps we were all wrong to oppose his match with that Spanish dancer. But then, Papa would never have countenanced it; oh never in the world! As I remember, she wanted him to run away with her, but he didn't quite dare. Didn't have enough to support her on, and was afraid of that weak chest of his. Well, well, perhaps he was right. I'm sure Papa would never have forgiven him. Though I don't know that matters turned out so very much better as it was.

"Gloria's pretty too, but she doesn't resemble Nathan in the least. No, no, not in the least. I wonder what's to become of her now? Dear, dear! Strange she shouldn't look more like Nathan or his wife or that girl of his. Now I think of it, she looks just a bit like that Spanish dancer. Dear, dear!



Perhaps that is why Nathan was so fond of her. But what's to become of her? I wonder what Peter thinks about it?" And she stole a look at her eldest brother.

He too was regarding the girl and thinking: "Here's a pretty kettle of fish! Nathan ought to have considered this when he took her in. He couldn't have expected to live to any great age with that weak chest of his. Damned foolishness that, his making a journey to the Continent to saddle himself with that girl. Must have known the responsibility would fall on one of us. Wonder what's to become of her?"

"She's not bad looking either. Fierce little devil, though. Job for someone to break her. Mightn't mind tackling it myself if I were forty years younger. Wonder what's to become of her though?" He was watching her with his little selfish eyes and thinking: "I can't take her in. Sarah'd never permit it. She wouldn't trust me. She'd be afraid I'd make love to her. Too bad she was Nathan's granddaughter; a pretty girl like that in the household. But then Nathan never cared for those things. I suppose it was his weak chest made him like that. He wasn't in the least like me. But dear me! Sarah would never have allowed a thing like that. I'm too old, I'm too old," he muttered.

"Lord, thou hast been our refuge from one generation to another. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever the earth and the world were made. . . . For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday . . . and fade away suddenly like the grass. In the morning it is green and groweth up; but in the evening it is cut down, dried up and withered."

Gloria raised her head sharply; and Aunt Letty, leaning forward, offered her a bottle of smelling salts.

The girl refused it with a little shrug of her shoulders, and Peter thought,—“Ah, that’s French, that gesture, that isn’t English. I suppose she’s inherited that from her precious father. Not that it takes anything from her attractiveness. There’s something very charming about French women. The French teach their girls to please; that’s their natural bent. If they find they don’t please the first time, what do they do? Give it up as a bad job? Not at all. They go home to their little rooms and think it over, and they say ‘Here I failed, and there.’ And then they go back and try again. Catch an English girl taking pains like that! And yet, after all, that’s what women are for, to please men.” He licked his lips furtively, and composed his features to pray.

Meanwhile, over in his place by the window with his back to the light, old Samuel Marsh, the Baldwin’s neighbour and oldest family friend, was thinking,—“Well, there’s another of us gone. Poor Nathan! he never got much out of life. Couldn’t seem to understand the art of living, that’s what Peter used to say. Always was like that. Always had a weak chest. No stamina, no stamina! All the same, it’s a pity. Only sixty-eight. Heigho! I daresay I shall be the next. Well, well, we must all go some day.”

And beside him, Hildegard Baldwin, whom he had once wanted to marry, but so long ago that they had both forgotten it, was thinking,—“If I had married Alnwick Westlake I might have had a child older than Gloria. I might have had a lot of children.” And out of the barren hunger of this thought, a bitterness against the pretty young girl sitting across

from her slowly grew and fostered, for this was an old grievance.

And next to Hildegarde, Susan Bixby was thinking,—“Poor little Gloria! She’ll be awfully alone now. I wonder what’s to become of her? I wish I could do something. I might put Tony back in the nursery for a time. They’d be awfully crowded, but she can’t very well stay alone. Perhaps it would be better if someone went to stay with her. I might spare a couple of days, though it’s hard just now when I’m changing Baby’s food. But there doesn’t seem to be anyone else,—unless, of course, Irene would go.”

Her gaze, shifting in search of Irene, crossed that of her cousin Tom, who was thinking: “Now, there’s that Gloria to be disposed of. Wonder what they’ll do with her? Shouldn’t imagine she’d stand much dictation. Plucky little devil! She’ll kick over the traces the way her mother did if they don’t take care. Mightn’t be a bad thing to hang around in case there was trouble. She’s damned attractive. Might need someone to stick up for her. Might be grateful for a little attention.” He smiled the peculiar secretive smile he had cultivated in order to hide his bad teeth. Of course, in a way she was his cousin, but then, . . . men did these things. He drew in his lips with a little sucking sound, passing his tongue uncertainly over his teeth. He looked up, meeting his uncle Peter’s gaze fixed on him in a ferociously inquisitive stare, and his own eyes dropped hastily to his prayer-book.

“Damned sly little pup!” muttered Peter Baldwin to himself. He was not fond of his youngest nephew.

The Reverend Jonas Wilkins began in a sing-song voice to read from the first chapter of Corinthians.

Irene Baldwin listened and heard the familiar words dully. Slowly on her consciousness was dawning the question, where was Gloria to go, now that Uncle Nathan was dead? She was still wondering about it when they rose to say the Creed. Irene's lips scarcely moved, but Aunt Hildegarde made up for it by the loudness with which she expressed her own convictions, repeating the words in an aggressive tone, as if expecting someone to contradict her.

The end came at last. There was a general shuffling of feet as the people rose. Everyone looked at Gloria and then looked away again. Now that the service was over they all seemed in a hurry to be gone.

There was a dull bumping as the coffin was raised to the shoulders of the bearers. It threatened to catch at one side and Gloria started forward as if to help. Aunt Letty laid a restraining hand on her arm and she shrank back suddenly. Joe Bixby coughed raucously behind his black-gloved palm. The coffin swayed menacingly down the aisle.

Out in the vestibule the undertaker, a small pock-marked man with goggle eyes, warned, "Now then, now then, not so fast. Careful around that corner. That's it. Easy does it." The dead man was got safely out of the chapel.

Simeon Baldwin came puffing up to Gloria, his watch in his hand.

"Sorry, sorry, but I've an engagement in the City. Couldn't put it off any later. Man going to America this afternoon. Postponed it, as it is, so as to get here. Tom will go to the grave;—represent me, you know, and all that." He took her hand in a limp grasp. "Hope you'll be all right. If there's anything you want—you know we'll always be glad

to help you if we can. 27 Hill Street,—you know the address. Anything we can do. Any time—” his voice trailed off as he hastily backed away to make room for the next. Gloria shook hands with them all in turn.

The mourners who were to go to the grave filed into the carriages two and two. Tom Baldwin couldn't find his hat and was left scrabbling about for it in the dark vestibule till he found it was too late to go on. So offering a particularly bad cigar to one of the undertaker's assistants, and rightly supposing that no one would miss him, he abandoned the cortege; and cutting off in the opposite direction, rapidly took himself out of sight. To the grave, in duty or affection, went the others.

An hour or so later they were all back in the house of the dead man. A cheerless home at the best of times, this house of Nathan's, with its heavy stuff curtains and dingy hangings, its cumbrous Victorian furniture and airless rooms. Nathan himself had disliked it, living almost altogether, after his wife's death, at Torquay, in inexpensive but comfortable lodgings.

The will was read in the back drawing room where a feeble fire fluttered discouraged in a greasy grate.

Nathan Baldwin had left all the money at his disposal, together with all properties, lands, et cetera, to his brother Peter, to be used by him for the support of his granddaughter Gloria, child of his deceased daughter, Rosemary Baldwin, until such time as she should come of age. After that the principal was to go to Gloria direct. Peter and Simeon were appointed executors. . . .

There was no fault to be found with the will.

Everyone murmured his or her approval, and prepared to depart.

The rain had begun to fall, a chill winter rain, spiritless and depressing. Gloria stood by the window, watching the spatter of the drops against the dull pane. She was thinking of the dead man and his many kindnesses to her, and how she might have eased his burdens here, or been more patient there, for youth is ever headstrong and impatient with age.

Irene came over to the window and put her arm around the girl's waist a trifle diffidently. Gloria did not return the pressure. She was staring moodily at the rain-drenched pane.

Irene conquered a spasm of timidity and kissed her. The girl smiled pathetically. In a sudden burst of tenderness Irene said:

"You'll come to us, to-morrow? To stop a while, I mean."

The girl shook her head. "I—I can't, yet. I want to stay here a little while at least."

"But alone?"

Gloria nodded. "Mrs. Brownlow is here to help me, if I need help. I'm used to her. We'll dismiss the housemaid, but *she'll* stay I hope, for a time, until the house is sold. Uncle Peter says it must be put up for sale at once because it's a good time,—rents are going up in the neighbourhood. I—I don't know what I may do later—" her voice trailed off. Irene drew her closer.

"Come to us until you decide what you want to do. You'll be quite free, you know. I wish you would come with me now."

But Gloria answered decisively: "No, not now. Not just yet. It's kind of you, but I can't leave yet."

I—I can't explain it, but I—I want to wait here till I'm sure he's gone. I suppose that sounds silly." She paused, and Irene only pressed her hand in reply.

"Come next week then," she suggested.

"Yes, next week, perhaps. I don't know. I suppose I might come next week."

Reluctantly Irene left her still watching the spurt-ing raindrops. Outside the house doubts began to assail her. What would Richard think of what she had done? Her invitation had in truth been so very indefinite.

"I really ought to have consulted Richard first," she told herself. "I should have spoken to him before I arranged anything. Suppose he shouldn't like it? After all, it's his house. It might have been wiser to wait a bit to see how things worked out. I wonder if Richard will be angry?"

"But then, there didn't seem to be any suitable place for her to go, except, perhaps, to Susan Bixby's. And they're so crowded there. She's hardly got room, and just now the girl would hate stumbling over babies all the time. Oh dear! it did seem as if I had to do it, and yet—I wish I had asked Richard first."

She drew back into the corner of the carriage which she shared with Isabel Hartley, Simeon's married daughter, and tried to formulate what Richard would say when he heard what she had done, and how she might best phrase her explanation.

Back in the dull old house in Montague Street, which, of all the houses around, showed not a light now that night was beginning to fall, Gloria still stood by the window gazing out, her thoughts struggling between contemplation of the future and the dull pangs of recollection, until Mrs. Brownlow, Nathan's

old housekeeper, came and urged her down to supper. Even then she sat at table, idle, staring before her; and out in Kensal Green Cemetery, unmindful of the falling drops, the dead man lay serene under his six feet of earth, while his soul, like some glad bird set free, sped onward through the vasty spaces of the Infinite.



## CHAPTER II

### GLORIA

RICHARD BALDWIN never forgot the day he came home from his office early and found Gloria standing on the doorstep waiting for admittance. She had just alighted from a taxi, and the man had put her box down beside her on the step,—a little shabby black box pasted over with labels, the very one, had he but known it, which had held Rosemary Baldwin's slender trousseau the day she eloped with her lover just nineteen years before.

At first Richard did not recognise the girl. She made no effort to introduce herself, but stood looking up at him with a perplexed little smile, while Richard hastily searched his mind for a clue to her identity. She had lived down at Torquay a good deal of late (Nathan Baldwin had found the air there agreed with his chest), and but for the day of the funeral, Richard had not seen her half a dozen times in as many years.

Also she was at that age when girls suddenly cease to be children, and put on, with their lengthened skirts and turned-up hair, a new dignity which disguises them completely. Only Gloria's hair was cropped short. It curled in obstreperous little curls about her ears. And her figure still kept its rather childish contours, like those of a lithe young boy. In fact she

looked like a boy as she stood there, slim and straight, gazing up at him.

It was the bobbed hair which all of a sudden made Richard recognise her.

"You're Gloria," he said and smiled at her.

She gave back a smile, like a swift ray of sun-light lighting the sombre pools of her eyes, and just for a second the eyelids flickered uncertainly. Then she spoke in a cool firm voice.

"Yes," she said, "I've come to stay."

Richard managed to conceal his surprise and glanced down at her box. He had his key out, but the maid was already opening the door.

"Come in," he said. "Martha, tell Glenning to bring up that box. This is Miss Gloria Baldwin. Has Mrs. Baldwin said which room she is to have?"

The maid looked at him stupidly and shook her head.

"No, sir. I didn't know about it, sir. But Mrs. Baldwin is in the morning room. I'll ask her."

Gloria hesitated just an instant on the threshold and Richard spoke quickly.

"Well, we'll very soon arrange that." He took her arm. This was no way to welcome her to the house. If Irene had asked her, she should have prepared for her. He led the way into the morning room. Irene was lying on the couch. She rose hastily as they entered, glancing from the girl to Richard with a frightened expression.

Richard leaned over and kissed the curve of her cheek.

"Here's Gloria come to stay, and no room assigned to her."

Irene flushed. "Oh I'm sorry. I know. I for-

got to speak about it. I was trying to decide which room. Which do you think she'd like, Richard? The yellow one, I thought? Yes, I think perhaps she'd better have the yellow room,—near me. I'll tell Martha." She slipped out.

Richard crossed to the tea-table on which the polished silver kettle gleamed brightly. "Sit down," he said, "and take off your hat. I'll pour you a cup of tea. Cream or lemon?"

The girl glanced indifferently at Irene's well-appointed little table. Irene had taken to having lemon in her tea, Russian fashion. The yellow slices, neatly scalloped around the edges, lay in an orderly circle on the thick glass plate, a silver prong across them.

Gloria took off her hat and tossed it upon the couch. "Cream," she said decisively.

"Right!" said Richard with satisfaction. "So do I."

He filled her a cup of the steaming tea.

"Now tell me what you have been doing in the last few weeks. Legal matters satisfactorily taken care of?" Gloria nodded.

"You leave it to old Simeon," Richard advised her. "Do what he says when the time comes to manage it on your own. You won't do yourself any harm to stick by him. He knows what he's about. Shrewdest man of business, taken all in all, I ever knew. How did you come up from Torquay?"

Gloria looked down at her cup. "Tom Baldwin brought me." Richard's eyebrows lifted.

"Tom!" he said inquiringly, half to himself.

Irene returned, looking a little flushed. "Your room is all ready, Gloria. I've had your box put in there. I've put you in the blue room, after all. The

mirror's a bit better, and the light. I thought you might want to read a good deal. I—I hope you'll be comfortable."

"Thank you." The girl slipped to her feet. "I think I'll go up and unpack now." She hesitated diffidently. "It's good of you to have me here," she murmured, flushing. "I—I didn't know what to do—" She paused and Irene gently pressed her hand.

"I'll go unpack now," Gloria finished hurriedly, and vanished through the door.

"Dinner is at eight," Richard called after her.

Irene came over and laid her hand affectionately on his shoulder. She played a little with the lapel of his coat. Richard looked up from the paper he had opened before him. "Yes?" he said. Irene hastily took her hand away. She stood looking at him for a moment before she spoke. He was a lean clean-shaven man with sympathetic blue eyes. His nose, a modified form of the usual Baldwin appendage, had just the suspicion of a hook,—like a hawk's bill, his cousin Sharlie had once said, but that was an exaggeration. His mouth was a straight line across, with the lips a trifle thin, altogether an ascetic sort of face. Irene, watching him reflectively, thought how handsome he was, so strong and tall and decisive. It pleased her that Richard should be decisive. She lacked decision pitifully herself and was well aware of it.

But some explanation must be made for this rather unexpected and unannounced arrival of Gloria. Was he angry? Richard could look stern too.

"I hope you won't mind very much, Richard. You know I told you I had suggested to her that she should come here the day of the funeral. She didn't want to, then, and I—I rather thought she had forgotten——"

Richard folded his paper over to the fourth page. "Oh, it's all right," he said. "I don't suppose she'll want to stop indefinitely. She'll be looking about for something to occupy herself with, I expect. Let's see, how old is she?"

"She'll be eighteen in something less than a month. It would seem cruel, don't you think, not to take her in when she so obviously hasn't any place to go? Was I wrong to ask her?"

"No," he said. "It can't be helped, and I expect it's a decent thing to do. Poor little beggar! It's hard for her, having no one who cares particularly."

"Yes, isn't it?" Irene agreed absently.

In the little room which had been assigned to her at the back of the house, Gloria sat with folded hands and contemplated her surroundings and her general situation.

She had refused Irene's offer to send Martha to her to help her unpack, and her little trunk with its leathern straps all unbuckled and lying loose on the ground like a shabby demi-rep in déshabille, was still unopened.

The fading sunlight coming through the half-opened window fell upon her head, touching its dark glossiness with streaks of copper. She sat lost in reverie, a thoughtful frown between her eyes, yet strangely pretty with her resolute little chin and small full-lipped mouth that had somehow the look of being parted without being actually open. There was about her face the rapt expression of those in love with life,—a strange little face, imperious and rather wistful, betraying the character beneath, a heart filled with sudden starts, given to quick rushes of joy and strangely sweet pangs. A wild faery child this, caught from

some other sphere. What hope that those two below, who had accepted her presence so casually, could understand her?

No thought of this sort entered Gloria's head, however. And she would have protested against such an analysis. In all matters concerning herself, Gloria was very matter-of-fact. There the Baldwin strain in her contested forcibly with the imaginative. She might have discovered this discord in herself, but the Baldwins do not go in for self-analysis. She was not thinking of herself at all.

She was in truth considering her hosts with a grave, not uncritical judgment. In spite of the fact that it was Irene who had befriended her, she liked Richard the better. There was something in him which answered to the unspoken, almost unguessed need in her. Even in that one brief interview she felt that he would understand her the best. But she was glad of them both. In the loneliness of the Torquay lodging where she had been making disposition of Nathan's effects, there had come upon her a hunger for friends,—for life as she had not yet known it.

In her brief career there had only been the life with her grandfather, smooth, unruffled by any but minor ills, moderately happy, flowing on like a river between broad even banks. The only excitement had been Nathan's periodical panics about his health. He had been afraid, always expecting death. And in the end death had surprised him. She thought of that now. Before, it had been enough for her to be simply fond of the old man, but now she saw him, veiled it is true in a kind of temporising pity, yet in his true character, a weak man, timorous in the face of life, kindly but negative.

And Gloria was not timorous. She rose and walked over to the open window. The view was limited, but she was not looking at a single small portion of London. Her far-seeing gaze was fixed on things distant, on all the universe, on Life itself. It was all before her out there in the rosy light. Youth! And all the world before her. Nathan could no longer hold it back from her.

And suddenly Gloria raised her arms on either side of her body, for all the world like a bird trying its newly-discovered wings. As she turned back into the room there was a little smile trembling on her lips.

## CHAPTER II

### RICHARD REFLECTS AND THE OTHERS GOSSIP

RICHARD BALDWIN sat tipped back in his chair in the office of Baldwin, Baldwin & Son, and briefly contemplated the state of affairs.

The girl had come to stay, evidently. She was there for a long visit at any rate, that was flat. He and Irene had both urged it upon her, in a way. That is, when Nathan's old house in Montague Street had been closed and the place put up for sale, they had agreed that Gloria had better stop on with them.

"For the present, at least," Irene had added and then tried to cover the remark with an extra amount of kindness lest the girl's feelings should be hurt.

And Gloria had agreed to remain, probably indefinitely. At least no further plans had been made than that she should bring the few things she particularly wanted from Nathan's house to theirs. It wasn't exactly what they had planned, but then it had turned out like that. Irene and Richard had talked it over once or twice together and agreed that, just for the present at least, there was nothing else to be done.

They hadn't let Gloria guess, of course, that there was any question about her remaining with them. Irene liked her, and Richard himself was far from dissatisfied. After all, it did Irene good to have someone there with her. Irene was too much alone. She ought to have had children. It was a shame she couldn't. She had seemed a little restless of late.



He himself had been awfully busy, so that he couldn't be with her as much as usual. Another woman might have grown discontented; it must be dreary all day in that big house, but thank Fortune! Irene had an even disposition. But it was good for her to have Gloria there to talk to.

Breakfast that morning had been very pleasant. Having someone there had cheered Irene up quite a bit already. That morning she had talked a good deal, for her. It was obviously doing her good, having the girl there, no matter what old Simeon said. His theory was doubtless true enough in a good many cases, but Irene was different. She wasn't the kind of woman to have ideas put into her head. There wasn't anything flighty about Irene.

And she had looked uncommonly pretty in that lilac dressing-gown of hers this morning, with the little flush on her cheeks. Colour was becoming to her, and Irene always seemed to flush when she talked with strangers. There flashed across his mind the memory of the time he had first met her, at Staines, in the midst of a lawn-tennis party. How red she had got when he asked her name over again. Not as pretty then as she was now, either. The weight she had put on since was becoming to her. Her arms peeping out from the soft lace ruffles as her hands moved in and out among the blue teacups were round and smooth. The girl Gloria's looked almost scrawny beside them.

But Gloria was a nice girl and uncommonly clever; too serious though. Irene didn't need that. Then he remembered how recent was her bereavement and thought possibly it might account for her gravity.

"She's young; she'll brighten up in time," he told himself. "We must see about a little mild amusement

for her. It won't do to let her mope. She'll brighten up and go about, and take Irene with her."

Yes, it might be worse in spite of what Simeon had said: "I hear you've got Nathan's girl staying with you."

"Yes," Richard assented.

"For long?" Simeon asked.

Richard had professed his ignorance on that matter: "I expect she'll make her home with us for a time," he said, "until she knows a little better what she wants to do. She's no trouble," he added lightly. Simeon shook his head.

"Don't do it! You're making a big mistake if you do. Don't ever take anyone into your family that doesn't belong there by rights. It's the height of folly. No good ever came of it yet. Why do you do it? I suppose she's not destitute? It isn't a case of necessity."

"No," Richard admitted, "it isn't exactly necessary."

"Then don't do it!" Simeon shook his head with decision. "Don't do it. A great man once said, and very truly: 'When it isn't necessary to do a thing, it is necessary not to do it.' Remember that, my boy. It's good advice. You ought to apply it to yourself. It isn't necessary for you to have Nathan's grandchild in your home. You oughtn't to do it, that's the long and the short of it."

Richard laughed. "Oh I expect she won't do any harm," he said. "She's no trouble."

But Simeon did not share his optimism. "No, but she'll make trouble. You may depend upon it. It's born in the breed. She may put ideas in Irene's head. How do you know what she's up to all day? I tell

you you're making a mistake if you keep her longer than a few weeks."

"Oh nonsense," Richard had said, and passed on into his own room.

"Old Simeon is an ass!" he told himself irritably as he swung himself back in his swivel-chair and reflected on his senior partner's recent remarks. There had been something about the tone of Simeon's advice that annoyed him profoundly.

And yet he was fond of Simeon. Of all the brothers, Simeon had shown the greatest interest in himself, tipping him generously as a boy, advising him, and later assenting with alacrity to his inclusion in the firm (after certain monetary considerations, referred to Mark Baldwin, Richard's father, had been adjusted). This had occurred only a few weeks before Mark's death, but Richard had amply justified both his father's and his uncle's estimates of him. He was both successful and industrious, and had come to shed new lustre on the name of the already well-known firm of solicitors. Well past the stage which people speak of as "coming," he and Simeon had pulled well together, very little friction, very few disagreements. And he knew that, in his cold way, Simeon was fond of him, fonder indeed than he was of his own son Tom; but that was scarcely to be wondered at. Still in this matter of the girl, Gloria, the old chap was all wrong. So Richard said to himself.

There were others, however, who shared Simeon's opinion. At Aunt Letty's, the affair was discussed at even greater length.

"I think Richard must be crazy to have considered such a thing!" Hildegard Baldwin was saying hotly. She stood up as she spoke and joined the others at the

tea-table; a tall, spare woman with dark hair still glossy, and an imperious brow, unlined still, for all the bitterness of a life's disappointment. For life had disappointed her terribly.

In her youth she had been the handsomest of all the Baldwins, and great things had been expected of her. She had expected great things of herself. It was predicted of her that she would make a grand marriage. But there was a kind of hauteur about her, a coldness which kept men off even though they admired her from a distance. At all events, nothing came of the predictions. The years slipped by and Hildegarde remained unmarried, even though her sister, far less interesting and attractive, had obtained a husband for herself. And the admirers seemed in some indefinable way to have dropped off. By the time she was twenty-seven, their old friend and neighbour, Samuel Marsh, and one miserable little curate down near her aunt's place at Cheltenham, remained the authors of her only undoubted proposals.

Then there came the affair with Sir Alnwick Westlake. It had left a bad taste in her mouth, this last. Sir Alnwick had been devoted for two seasons. The hopes of a brilliant marriage which, though unconfessed, had begun to die down in Hildegarde's heart, sprang up again like flowers after rain. Outwardly she was more haughty and imperious than ever, but who can say what soft dreams may have stirred in her breast?

At length Sir Alnwick professed his love. Hildegarde had seen it coming for days, and thought herself not unprepared. But alas! a dreadful thing happened. Sir Alnwick made her a proposal, it is true, but not of the sort Hildegarde had expected.

That her sensibilities were hurt may be doubted. It is unlikely that she really cared for the man; she was too cold. But as she had been subtly flattered by his attentions, so now her pride was touched, nay more than touched, unforgiveably hurt.

Sir Alnwick was sent about his business. She spoke her mind to him once and then kept her own counsel, preferring to be thought "odd" rather than to betray her humiliation. Her family was given to understand that she had refused the baronet. "He is not worthy of me," was all the explanation she would give. Perhaps it was true in so far as it went. Many were the family storms and discussions, but Hildegarde always kept her secret to herself.

Only the shame, having no outlet, remained to fester, a never-healing wound which grew as the years passed and no worthy cavalier came to fill the place left empty by the false knight,—a bitterness not altogether untinged by regret that she had not accepted his proffer.

When Mrs. John came into the family, she and Hildegarde were the first to strike up a friendship. Something in their natures was akin. They agreed in many ways when the more moderate Letty demurred. It was they who had been most bitter against Nathan's adoption of his fatherless grandchild, they who most strenuously opposed it,—brought into common agreement, the one because in her youth she had yielded, the other because she had resisted temptation.

To-day as they sat side by side opposite Letty, who dozed in her chair, their tongues busy with the affairs of their neighbours, there was something akin even in their looks. They were agreed in denouncing this new folly of Irene's. Asking a girl there to stop an

indefinite time! Fancy! As if poor Richard wanted to be bothered looking after an irresponsible young thing like that. Such an awkward age too, neither child nor woman. A wild little thing without a doubt. Anyone could tell that to look at her. That short hair, for instance, flying all over "seven ways from Sunday!" Who could tell what she might take it into her head to do!

"Irene's got a new hat," Hildegarde said. "We are talking about Irene, Letty,—she's got a new hat. Gloria helped her pick it out. It's quite different to the kind she usually wears. Quite becoming, too. It's small and sits up on her head. Richard doesn't like it. He likes her in a big hat. He says she's too large to wear a small hat, but Irene says she likes it better than any hat she's ever had. So light, she says, she doesn't know she's got it on. And so trim. Easy to keep her hair looking well under it. Irene's hair is so heavy, you know. Quite too much to do up well. Gloria suggests she crop it, but Richard puts his foot down on that. Irene laughed too, when she told me about it. Of course she wouldn't."

"I should think not!" Letty remarked indignantly. "At her age! And such hair as Irene's got. What nonsense! Are she and Richard going anywhere this spring?"

Hildegarde didn't know, hadn't heard it mentioned. Mrs. John doubted if they would. "Richard has been pretty busy of late. So Simeon tells me. He can't very well get away. And now they've got Gloria there, I suppose that's another difficulty. Of course she and Irene might go somewhere together. Doubtless that is what they mean to do later, in the hot months."

"Though I don't know that Gloria can afford it. Simeon says Nathan left much less than they expected. It seems there was some money in South African railway shares. He'd sold them just a short time before he died and hadn't said anything to Simeon about it. He bought American oil shares instead. Simeon was furious when he found it out. Says no one but a man with one foot in the grave would have thought of doing such a thing. It cuts down Gloria's income quite a bit. She'll have to be very careful, Simeon said."

"Peter thinks it would be wise if she got something to do," remarked Hildegarde.

"Oh no!" said Letty in a shocked voice.

"Oh, something quite genteel and lady-like," Mrs. John hastened to explain. "Many girls are doing it now, you know. Like a secretaryship or a clerkship. It's really very sensible."

"I don't see," interrupted Hildegarde tartly, "why she shouldn't take a situation."

(It is characteristic of the untrained that they always speak of "taking a situation," never of "getting one.")

"A secretary's is a good clean job."

Mrs. John agreed. "And they can be most useful. I've often thought of employing one myself. I could make use of one very frequently."

Hildegarde's nose wrinkled slightly. "Dear me," she remarked, "I wish I had money enough to need a secretary to look after it."

Mrs. John dropped the lids over her eyes to hide their glitter. It was a trick she had, much as a cat swings its tail to and fro before pouncing. Like the cat's, the action boded no good for the opposer.

"Well of course, you wouldn't ever get married, you know. You've your own self to blame that you're not a widow with a neat income to-day. They say Alnwick Westlake left over eighty thousand pounds when he died last year."

She watched Hildegarde closely from under her lowered lids as she spoke. That matter had never been quite clear to her, but with a sure instinct for the disagreeable, she guessed that allusion to it touched the raw.

Hildegarde Baldwin bit her lip.

Letty broke an awkward pause by throwing the conversation back to Gloria and her affairs. After all, she admitted, no doubt Gloria was great company for Irene. She used to be so much alone. Irene always seemed somehow a little apart from them all. Not through anybody's fault, she was sure, but she didn't get acquainted easily. And Richard's father and mother both being dead so long before Richard had even met Irene made a gap in the family relation,—if they knew what she meant. There wasn't the connection with the older generation, as there was in dear Susan and dear Isabel's cases, whose fathers, her dear brothers, were both living. Irene was just a bit shy, too. Probably having Gloria there would bring her out a bit, might really be a boon, in a way.

Mrs. John sniffed. "It's a great pity Irene couldn't have found a more suitable companion than that little illegitimate offspring of Rosemary Baldwin and a dissolute Frenchman."

"But he wasn't really French," Aunt Letty protested. "He only lived in France."

But Hildegarde interrupted again, siding with Mrs. John. Stella was right, she insisted. Always full of



airs and affectations, Rosemary was. Nathan had had his hands full with her even as a girl. He had done everything for her and in return she had disgraced him by running off with that dreadful scoundrel. Nonsense it was, Nathan's going after her like that. They said that when he found her she hadn't yet named the baby. She was ill in bed, really dying, in fact, and when Nathan asked her about the child, they said, she seized the baby in her arms and began reciting the "Gloria."

When Nathan asked her what she wanted the baby called, she said its name was Gloria.

"Made it up on the spur of the moment, I expect." Hildegarde was contemptuous: "Made it up just then and pretended to have thought it all out before. That was so like Rosemary,—all affectation! Fancy grabbing up the poor little creature like that and reciting the Gloria! Sacrilegious, I call it. It just proved what Tom Baldwin always said,—the trouble with Rosemary was that she had the dramatic instinct over-developed. Very clever analysis, that, I think, and so true."

Mrs. John nodded her head vigorously. "It wasn't much of a 'Gloria' for Nathan, with the child to support for the rest of his days," she remarked. She had no patience with such performances! And if Richard wasn't careful, he'd have something of the same sort to deal with. Richard and Irene were both too young to try to manage a girl like that, especially one over whom they could not have the slightest claim to authority. She was passionate, as anyone could see to look at her, and probably, like her mother before her, would have no principles. In a very short time, if they didn't watch out, well—h'mm—Mrs.

John closed her thin lips tightly together and looked volumes.

Hildegarde gazed at her horrified. "You don't think there's anybody,—now?"

Mrs. John shook her head. "No, but just give her time. There will be, you may depend upon it. She's one of these independent little things, and when that kind take it into their heads to be wild, they do it very thoroughly. There's no holding them. If any man pays her the least attention, mark my words, there'll be trouble. She's her mother's own child and when she takes it into her head to play the same tricks, you may depend upon it, she'll go her own gait. Richard and Irene will have their hands full looking after her——"

She looked up, glancing across the room and stopped abruptly. Gloria Baldwin stood framed in the doorway.

The three old women stared at the girl, their mouths slightly agape, a foolish expression on their faces. Aunt Letty rattled her teacup nervously. Then Hildegarde rose and advanced to greet the unexpected guest.

At first they were not sure whether Gloria had heard or not what they had said, but she did not leave them long in doubt. She moved a few steps into the room and looked at them defiantly, her proud little head tilted back on her shoulders. She looked hardest at Mrs. John.

"I heard what you said," she remarked in a cold unruffled voice.

It was lack of social tact, no doubt, for her to say such a thing. It made the situation very awkward.

By all the Baldwin standards, she should at least have pretended not to have heard.

Embarrassed out of their wont, the three old women looked at the wall, the tea-table, the window, or with a fascinated gaze at the girl herself,—anywhere but at one another. It was Mrs. John who recovered herself first.

"There's an old saying about listeners hearing no good of themselves!" she remarked tartly. She was angry at being made to feel as she did.

Aunt Letty tried to soften this indictment. "My dear," she said simply, "I'm sorry you should have overheard us. But I'm sure we didn't mean what we said in the sense in which you seem to have taken it. We were only,—only—" She paused pathetically and turned to her sister for help.

"My dear Gloria," Hildegard broke in briskly, "you cannot expect to be above criticism. Nobody is. I'm sure I've been talked about enough in my time and I never thought of resenting it as you seem to do. Of course there must be comment on your position. But after all, it's all in the family, you know. It isn't as if we were outsiders."

"I don't see that that makes it any better," said Gloria stubbornly.

Mrs. John shrugged her shoulders and rose. "I think I'll be going, Letty. I've had a very pleasant afternoon,—until now," she added pointedly. "Come to see me when you feel like getting out again. There's a good cup of tea waiting for you in Regent's Park, you know. Good-bye, everybody." She nodded jerkily and retired. Hildegard followed her out into the hall.

"I do detest that girl," Mrs. John exclaimed outside, with a backward toss of her head.

"It's very unfortunate she should have overheard us," Hildegarde agreed. "I can see Letty's quite upset about it."

"Never you mind," Mrs. John advised sagely. "She'll come round all right. You won't be able to hurt *her* feelings much; she's a bold young hussy!"

And Hildegarde, striving to second this opinion, hurried back to the drawing-room to relieve Letty.

Gloria told Richard the whole story that evening. It seemed easier to speak to him about it than to Irene. She chose a few minutes when Irene had gone up-stairs to consult with the housemaid about some linen which was missing from the linen-closet.

"The old cats!" said Richard fiercely when she had finished. "The diabolical old cats!" Then he leaned across the table and patted her hand. "You mustn't mind them, little girl," he said gently, "they don't mean any harm, but they haven't much to do, so it's easy for them to spend their time criticising their neighbours. I suppose they have to have their gossip with their tea every afternoon, or they're not enjoying themselves. Don't let what they said worry you. I'd hate to think you were really upset over it. Promise me you won't think about it again. Will you?"

Gloria looked up at him with a perplexed little smile hovering about her mouth. She sat thus for a moment gazing straight into his eyes, and then slowly drew away her hand. There was a dull flush on her cheeks.

"I expect I was silly to mind it," she murmured. "After all, it doesn't really matter."

Irene came back with a worried line between her brows. It was undoubtedly true that two of the best

sheets were missing from the linen-closet, together with several towels. For the rest of the evening the conversation centred around the uncertain character of the new cook and her various shortcomings. Irene was not suspicious by nature and it really pained her to believe that the cook might possibly be concerned with the loss of the linen. Of course, there was always a doubt in such matters, but then the laundress was *so* irreproachable! Well, you could never be sure.

Gloria did not refer again to the episode of the Aunts' overheard conversation, nor did Richard mention to Irene what had occurred. It would only have worried her, perhaps.

## CHAPTER IV

### GLORIA SINGS

It was a Sunday evening, and the family in Richard's house in Prince's Gate were gathered in the drawing-room, a large well-furnished room which was the pride of Irene's heart, for it looked out over the little tree-filled square in the day-time and was a carefully lighted, beautifully curtained haven in the evening.

Gloria had seated herself at the piano. She was not a good musician. She really wasn't a musician at all, but she had a most agreeable way of strumming an accompaniment and singing to it in an unaffected and pleasing voice. And her audience of two cared little that the performance was amateurish.

She began with an Edward German song, and at first she hummed it lightly and didn't sing the words, and she followed it with one of the Country Dances, which she didn't play very well so she hummed a bit louder, and now and then sang out a bar or two. By this time Irene's interest was aroused and she said: "What was that last one, dear?" and then didn't wait to be answered but added: "Sing the one you sang last night about the 'Bonny Curl.' "

Irene was settled in a corner of the couch with her knitting and a book. It is a double feat which some are able to accomplish, but few indeed there are who can knit and read and listen intelligently to music at the same time. Irene was not an exception to the general rule, so the vague allusion to last night's enter-

tainment was only meant to assure her guest that in spite of the book on her lap, Irene enjoyed the singing and wanted it to go on. If she had been still more vague in her request for another song, one cannot tell but that much might have been spared her. Irene would never have thought in after life of blaming the "Bonny Curl" for anything that happened later. Yet it had its influence.

The song, written for a low voice, was entirely suited to Gloria's powers. It taxed her in no wise, and the picture conjured up by the words diverted her listeners from too critical an opinion of her performance.

She began, obedient to Irene's request:

"I have a curl, a bricht, brown curl,  
A bonny curl o' hair,  
And close to my heart it nestles warm,  
But its brithers dinna ken it's there.  
I stole my curl, my silk soft curl,  
My bonny curl o' hair.  
And a' the nicht it sleeps upon my heart,  
But it's master doesna ken it's there.

Richard had, until this time, barricaded himself behind the *Times*, and had sent up an occasional smoke screen to prove his complete absorption in the affairs of the world therein contained. But at the first plaintive note of the song he put down the paper and walked over to the grate to shake the ashes out of his pipe.

Gloria went on with the second verse, and Richard stood before the fire and started to refill the pipe. Then, as if thinking better of it, he put both pipe

and tobacco back on the mantelpiece and stood listening.

"O bricht bricht curl, O lovely lovely curl,  
O curl o' my bonny dear,  
I would that again ye were shinin' on his head  
But I would that his head were here,  
And I would that his head were here."

As the last note died away, Richard, whose head had an almost architectural trimness, and whose neat black locks lay flat and straight, found himself entertaining a delightful flight of fancy. He saw himself as one with curling brown hair, the missing one scarcely noticed in this imaginary wealth of ambrosial locks, sitting beside someone on a bench, which seemed somehow to look very much like his own piano bench. He seemed to be assuring this vague somebody that he quite forgave her the rape of the curl and that he was, curls and all, absolutely at her service.

What an awful ass Richard would have felt himself to be, had he been forced to explain why he said to Gloria: "Let's have that again, it's very pretty." But it was not necessary, and they could not guess his reason. In fact both Gloria and Irene were pleased that he had been entertained by the song, and so it was sung again. And this time Richard let his mind wander to more concrete things. The outlines of Gloria's white hands against the polished back of the piano; the poise of her head and the full white line of her throat.

" 'And I would that his head were here——' "



Gloria stopped abruptly. She swung herself around on the piano bench. "That's a silly song!"

"Oh, I don't think so," said Irene gently, "I thought it quite charming."

"I don't. I think it's silly," Gloria reiterated as she swung around to the instrument again.

Richard, who had stooped to pick up the paper he had been reading, put it down again and crossed to the piano.

"It isn't silly at all; it's lovely. It's a ripping song."

How could anyone not like a song which had caused him to feel that peculiar lightness, that indefinable exhilaration such as he had just experienced.

"If you say it's silly," he added, "I'll make you sing it again."

His mouth was smiling, but his eyes looked almost fiercely down at her. Gloria, her hands poised above the keys, had her own eyes raised to his; and as they held each other's gaze, he standing, she sitting there, something very subtle, something almost impersonal and quite outside themselves seemed to pass between them.

Irene had dropped a stitch in her knitting, a thing she seldom did. She was busily searching for it and so missed the little comedy enacted under her eyes.

There was a longish silence and then Gloria said deliberately:

"It's a silly song."

"You'll sing it again," said Richard.

"I won't!"

"You will!"

Another long pause with Richard continuing to gaze down at her, one hand resting on the top of the piano,

and Gloria staring back, her hands held motionless above the keys. The clock on the mantelpiece ticked steadily.

Irene looked up suddenly, having discovered the dropped stitch, and at the same moment Gloria began to sing.

When she had finished the last word, Richard turned and went back to his seat by the table.

Gloria rose and closed the lid of the piano with an air of finality. She curled herself up in a big chair on the other side of the table and opened a book she was reading at the place where the marker showed she had left off. But though her eyes occasionally followed the lines on the page, it was seldom that she turned a leaf. Her eyes kept going back to where Richard sat under the full glow of the electric lamp, which made a white patch of reflected light on his black hair.

Richard himself read diligently,—all about the recent labor troubles and the terrible state of unemployment. Now and then he folded over the pages of his paper to peruse a new item. The feeling of lightness which he had experienced earlier in the evening when Gloria was singing had gone, and it would have been absurd to say that he felt any real triumph in having made Gloria obey him, having conquered her in that little matter of the song. Yet behind the rustling pages of his newspaper there was something, however much he might ridicule it, there was something,—something——

It was there still even after Irene and Gloria had both said good night and left him. And when Richard,

with the lights extinguished, fumbled his way up-stairs after them, it did not, as he had thought it would, stay behind in the drawing room, but went up the stairs beside him.

## CHAPTER V

### AUNT LETTY AT HOME

THE Saturday being Gloria's birthday, Aunt Letty had sent out invitations for a party.

Ever since that episode of Gloria's sudden and untimely intrusion among them when they were busy discussing her, the good woman's conscience had troubled her. It seemed to her that a reconciliation should be effected, a kindness shown, and in Aunt Letty's mind a kindness was but another word for something good to eat and a jollification of some sort.

It was one of her idiosyncrasies that she could never think of her nephews and nieces as grown up. It seemed to her that they must still feel for the fancy cakes, in the concocting of which she was unexcelled, the same affection as when they played around her skirts and begged for "goodies" twenty years ago.

And if nieces appreciated such things, how much more must a grandniece! So she decided to give her party, her peace-offering.

Letty Bancroft was small and timid, with a deprecating expression, and a walk that was in reality a small trot. It delighted her to see people enjoying themselves, and she took great pleasure in preparing for this particular party. She had seen too little of Gloria to form any great attachment to herself, but the girl's grandfather had been her favorite brother. They had seemed to have more in common, Nathan and she,

than any of the others. In their childhood it had frequently been those two against the rest.

The slightly romantic streak which occasionally broke through Nathan Baldwin's conventional exterior, was duplicated and exaggerated in Letty's rather hungry little life. For Nathan, who was her elder by three years, she had entertained a prodigious admiration. As a young man he had fired her imagination with dreams of an unfound world of romance far beyond her ken. When he had had that affair of his with the Spanish dancer, now so many years forgotten, she had thought of it as the most romantic episode in the world, like a veritable page from a story book.

She had thought of him as wild and impetuous,—poor Nathan, who was always afraid and always doubting of that weak chest of his, was a hero in his sister's eyes. Even when, under parental pressure, he had given up the Spanish dancer and settled down with the rather colourless woman of whom his family approved, she had not swerved from her allegiance to him.

They had seen little of one another of late years. She had liked his little daughter, Rosemary, as a child; although she had joined, as was only fit, in the general condemnation of her later conduct. She was sorry now that she had not made it a point to keep more closely in touch with Nathan. But then, he would stay so much of the time down at that stupid Torquay.

It had once occurred to her that it would be pleasant to have Gloria come to them after her grandfather's death, but she had not mentioned it outside and Irene had got ahead of her. She was much relieved that it should be so, for she had really feared to suggest such an arrangement to Hildegarde, with whom she lived. Hildegarde had such strict ideas of virtue. She had

never, it would seem, found it in her heart to forgive poor little Rosemary's misconduct.

But Hildegarde had not objected to this small party for Rosemary's daughter. Letty guessed rightly that Hildegarde, too, was a little ashamed of the episode of a few weeks back. As she puttered around the kitchen giving a touch here and criticising there, to the intense disgust of the cook, Aunt Letty had a fine scheme of reconciliation in view. With each drop of bright coloured frosting which she squeezed with her own hands from the pastry tube, with each curl and flourish of lettering she planned a new future for Gloria.

Aunt Letty thoroughly enjoyed these intimate preparations for the party. She was domestic at heart, and it sometimes grieved her that only on state occasions like the present was she permitted to enter the little dark kitchen in the lower regions of the house in Gloucester Terrace.

This was mainly due to Hildegarde's objections. Aunt Letty herself would have liked to try one of those new-fangled flats,—everything on one floor and no particular need for a housemaid, but Hildegarde frowned severely on such an idea. Hildegarde wouldn't live in a flat for worlds. To her, they spelt cheapness and impermanence. And as it was to a large extent Hildegarde's money which ran the house in Gloucester Terrace (a considerable portion of Letty's fortune having accompanied the late Bancroft in the way of all flesh) Letty felt herself obliged to yield to her sister's wishes.

But to-day in the little dark kitchen Aunt Letty stirred her cakes *à la reine*, and baked her ceremonial meats, and was quite happy in the thought that now all

that unpleasantness about Gloria was sure to be cleared up.

She and Irene and Richard had promised to come, and there would be Simeon and Isabel from Hill Street. Susan Bixby had accepted with the probability that Joe, her husband, might be able to drop in for a late cup and a few minutes' conversation at least, if Aunt Letty didn't mind leaving it at that. Joe was so rushed these days she didn't like to promise anything for him. Peter and Sarah would be there, and Matthew and his wife. Sharlie was still uncertain, Philip Hartley, Isabel's husband, had declined and the Tom Baldwins had sent no word at all. Letty had heard that things were not going well in that quarter, but then,—one never knew.

There had been a great question in Letty's mind about Mrs. John,—whether she should be invited or not. She recognized in that affair of a few weeks back, that Mrs. John had been the chief offender. How would Gloria act if they were to meet once more so soon, under the same roof?

And yet, on the other hand, Letty greatly feared the fierce little old lady and dreaded not to ask her, lest her wrath should descend upon them all.

In the end she sent a tactfully worded letter, making it quite clear that the party was given for Gloria. Mrs. John had returned a polite but firm "regrets." So everything promised to go quite smoothly in that direction at least.

There were, in addition to those named, several of the younger generation, children of neighbours and the like, for in spite of the fact that of the older generation of Baldwins there had been six men to only two girls, the present party as an index of Baldwin life,

promised to show a vast preponderance of females. It was too bad! Aunt Letty liked parties to be evenly balanced.

Of the family, of course, there was Peter. He was always imposing. He quite filled a room, very often making it seem as if there were three or four men there instead of one. And dear Richard! he was so handsome. He would give any gathering an air. And of course Simeon and Matthew would help. Aunt Letty had hesitated also about inviting Mrs. Wallace from across the way. But her exuberant hospitality had been unable to resist the temptation and had been rewarded by Mrs. Wallace accepting and promising to bring with her her young son Bernadotte, home from school on vacation. That would make someone a little young for Gloria. The party had seemed just a bit old for her before.

Richard, on his arrival at half-past five, found the party in full swing. He had stopped at the house on his way home from the City, but Irene and Gloria had already departed. So hastily changing his sack suit for a morning coat, he had hurried after them. All the way to Gloucester Terrace he had had an extraordinary light and airy feeling. He could not quite understand this feeling towards Aunt Letty's party. As a rule, such affairs bored him incredibly. Yet to-day, for some reason, he was positively looking forward to it. He was in a sort of jocular mood. There was about him a carelessness, a *laissez faire*, quite unusual to a person of his temperament.

The first person he saw on entering Aunt Letty's drawing-room, was young Bernadotte Wallace, and he detested the youth, mentally cataloguing him as a young cub, the sight of him to-day, sitting



beside his mother, his toes turned out, and his silly ogling eyes going round and round in his head, and the high collar almost cutting off his ears, gave Richard none of the sense of distaste which he commonly felt.

Richard paid his compliments to Aunts Letty and Hildegarde, and escaping one of Mrs. Wallace's lengthy recitals about her husband the general's latest quinsy, finally came to a halt beside his wife.

From where he stood he looked across at Gloria seated between Mrs. Peter Baldwin and Hildegarde. Among the aunts she was like a flame, so vital, so living. She had a good deal of colour to-day, he observed.

He saw her laugh at something Sharlie had just said, and from across the room he smiled in sympathy, although he could not hear what had provoked her mirth. She was so keen on a joke. Irene was just a little heavy at times. She didn't seem to sense things with the same quickness of perception; she didn't react, so to speak. Not that Irene wasn't keen—keener than most, but there was a difference.

He turned to Irene, who had fallen into Mrs. Wallace's clutches and was hearing all the details, so much more profuse than with anyone else, of Bernadotte's first attack of the measles, which had occurred in his fifth year. Mrs. Wallace thought at first that it had been in his fifth year, but it might have been his sixth. Now which was it? She appealed to Bernadotte himself, but the latter's recollection not being equal to the task imposed upon it, Aunt Letty was appealed to and called in to decide the question and confirm the interesting event. Letty ought to remember because, if Mrs. Wallace didn't mistake, it was the same year that Letty had had all that trouble with the drains. Didn't she recall?

No, it couldn't have been that year either, because that was the time Bernadotte had fallen off his donkey and been so horribly scratched. She had had to keep him in bed three weeks on that occasion. So it couldn't have been that year that he had the measles so hard. It must have been the next year.

Gently backing away from the group, Richard grossly abandoned Irene to her fate and crossed the room. He drew near to Gloria and watched her in silence for a few minutes. She was very pretty, he decided. That little pucker of the lip was so fetching. There was about her none of the allicient charm that attracts the average man, but a sweet simplicity more appealing than any conscious power.

Now that they were better acquainted, too, he found her so much more companionable. She had never been really shy; it was as if she looked you over critically and decided whether or not to talk to you. A little disconcerting, that, at times. But she had grown out of the habit of late. Now, as Richard came near, she chatted gaily. There were no barriers between them.

They formed a merry group, she and Richard and some of the younger members of the party, with Aunt Hildegarde watching with the lean suspicion of an old cat the antics of a group of kittens, and on the edges of the group Aunt Letty hovering, hearing about every third or fourth sentence and invariably responding to the one before the last when she joined in the conversation. After a few minutes she gave her chair to Richard and toddled across to her sister-in-law, Peter's wife, who was sitting rather stiffly by herself.

"Now Sarah, don't tell me you feel too old to be joining those children over there," Letty began.

"Oh, dear, no," Sarah tittered, as she raised a pudgy hand to her head and smoothed the blonde false front which sat like a nesting bird above her forehead.

She was a vulgar little woman whom Peter had married in his rather flamboyant youth and for whom he still felt a species of indulgent affection, for he was a man of small taste. She had charmed him then with her coy manner and artless indiscretions, and she used the same arts now to keep him enslaved. Her nephew Tom Baldwin had once remarked that she "looked like a decayed prostitute," but in her own mind age could not wither, nor custom stale her infinite variety. So she continued to affect the blonde curls which Peter had once admired, and short-vamp boots with perilously high heels which gave her a shaky appearance in walking, like a ship in a storm. She was given, too, to little "ohs" and "ahs" of exclamation and small screams of delight when anything pleased her. Yet on the whole she was a good-natured little dowd and no one really disliked her.

"Where's Stella?" she asked. Mrs. John and she were alternately boon companions or deadly enemies, according to Mrs. John's fluctuating moods and varying patience, and Sarah's ability to get over having her feelings hurt. At present they were on the best of terms.

Mrs. Bancroft explained in a subdued voice why she had been glad to receive Stella's decision not to be present at the party. Mrs. Peter agreed but nodded her head portentously.

"In a way I think Stella's quite right. She's a nice little girl, I'm sure, but it's taking a risk, don't you think? Of course I suppose you'll think me a foolish old woman, but I can tell you I'm glad she's not in

my house. Irene must be very confiding. Of course, she's much handsomer than Gloria, and all that, but you never can tell about men. The dears are so fickle, now, aren't they? I'll whisper to you the truth, I'm never any too sure of my Peter to this day! There! Now you're shocked. Yet I daresay it was the same with you in your time? No? Well, anyway, all I can say is, I'm just as well pleased it isn't my house that little dark-eyed thing is in." And she folded her fat little hands complacently on her stomach and nodded sagely.

Mrs. Bancroft was about to reply when the door opened and Mr. and Mrs. Matthew Baldwin were announced.

Matthew came in first. He was a medium-sized man with prominent blue eyes and a hawk-like nose, giving him something of the look of a bird. There were lines about his mouth and a cynical look which seemed to cover a secret roguery. With his bald head and high-backed shoulders, he bore rather a striking resemblance to Mr. Punch. He crossed the room immediately and shook hands with Simeon, who regarded his brother watchfully from under his heavy-lidded eyes, while the ghost of a smile played about his pale thin lips.

Mrs. Matthew toddled in after her husband. She was a woman of generous proportions and ample curves, who appeared to regard all existence, and in particular her own two children, with a mild surprise, like nothing so much as a hen who has inadvertently hatched out a pair of swans. Her husband she had learned in the course of a long and none too care-free married life, to get used to, but her daughters she would never be able to understand. Sharlie's affecta-

tions, and Susan's sudden protective rages for Joe and the children, were quite beyond her comprehension, and she had long ago given up all attempts at elucidating them. Sarah with her bird-like vivacity and pellucid mind she liked immensely, so after a hasty glance around the room, just to make sure who was there, she at once accepted Aunt Letty's offer of a chair beside Mrs. Peter and settled down for a good long chat.

"You don't think," Richard was saying to Gloria in a pause when the others had left them for a moment alone, "you don't think you would like to dine somewhere where it's a bit gay, to-night? Or how about a theatre? A birthday is a very serious occasion, you know. I don't believe you are properly conscious of the importance of the event."

"Oh, but I am! And you've all been so good to me. The books you sent me were lovely,—and Irene's handkerchiefs, too. And now this party of Aunt Letty's. It is really quite too much, without your suggesting a theatre-party, too."

"But would you like to go?" he persisted.

She was about to answer him when Peter interrupted them. He came over to them with a story of how he had got the best of a cab-driver who wanted to take him out of his way in order to ask a larger fare. But he had been too smart for the man. He had called a policeman and had the fellow sent about his business with a flea in his ear. Catch *him* napping!

He ended with an exclamation. "Now look there! Look at Sarah watching me. She thinks I'm going to get into mischief over here among you young folks. She thinks she has to keep an eye on me. Well, maybe she's right,—who knows? Eh? Now she's beckon-

ing me. Do you see, I'll have to go. That's what it is to have a tyrant for a wife."

He lumbered away and once more Richard turned to Gloria.

"Taken all and all, we're a queer lot, we Baldwins, aren't we?"

"I—I don't know." Gloria smiled. "Do you mean me, too?"

"To be sure! You're a Baldwin, just the same as the rest of us."

She looked out of the window towards the street, grey with the approaching dusk. "I don't know," she said slowly, "sometimes it doesn't seem to me that I'm like you at all. I never feel that I really belong to you—to the family, I mean."

"No," he answered quickly, "I don't wonder you feel like that. You're not really one of us. You're different. It's as if you were made of something more delicate,—some finer clay."

"Finer!" she repeated scornfully. She was thinking of Mrs. John's remarks that other day in this very drawing-room, for though she had decided to forgive, she had not forgotten. Richard sensed something of her confused thoughts. He hastened to explain lest she should be hurt.

"I mean you're different because of some discriminating touch of imagination in you which got left out of the rest of us. I think you see visions and dream dreams unknown to us. We're a prosaic lot. Now, looking around the room, for instance, now that we're here *en masse*, what characteristic stands out most prominently to your mind?"

"Noses, I should say." She laughed. "Just before you came in it seemed to me that the room was

full of noses. I felt as if I should be crushed by them, there seemed to be so many, and so big!"

Richard laughed gaily. "That wasn't exactly the sort of characteristic I had in mind, but no doubt you're right. Now here's another, the very essence of a Baldwin; what do you think of him?"

The door had opened and a late arrival appeared, —even later than poor Joe Bixby, who had come in a short time since. It was Tom Baldwin, Simeon's rather wayward son. His sleek hair, brushed with water, lay back smoothly on his rather large head, his heavy, slightly bloated face wore a peculiar expression, half jocular, as if amused at some obscure joke hidden from the rest of the company. After he had spoken to Aunt Letty, he at once crossed to Gloria. His greeting, which was too effusive for the occasion, she returned with a cool little nod, turning almost immediately to Richard.

"Well?" he asked when Tom, not relishing his reception, had passed on to another group.

"I don't like him," said Gloria shortly.

For some reason Richard felt extremely happy at her answer. But there flashed across his mind the memory of a certain event which had never been explained to him.

"You told me when you first came to Prince's Gate, that Tom had brought you up from Torquay. How did that happen?"

"I don't know. He just happened to be there and offered. I've scarcely seen him since. Why do you ask?"

"Oh, nothing," said Richard quickly, and in fact he would have been at a loss to explain why he had asked the question.

From across the room they watched Tom shaking hands with his father. The secret hostility which Simeon had always felt towards his son was in no way apparent save in the thin gleam from between the lids of the old man's drooping eyes with the little puffy bags beneath them, and in the cautious tightening of the thin-lipped mouth. But Richard and Gloria took no cognisance of these signs.

"Where did you go this afternoon?" Richard was asking. "You left the house so early. I stopped there for you, you know."

"Oh, did you? I'm sorry. Irene and I went down to an exhibition. Some lovely paintings there were, too. You should see them."

"Why didn't you tell me you were going? I would have joined you."

She said nothing; and Richard felt aggrieved, as if he had missed some treat.

Irene crossed the room. "I've promised to go back with Isabel to Hill Street for dinner and to a concert afterward. It's a man she is interested in who plays to-night and he has sent her a box. You don't mind if I leave you and Gloria alone to-night?" She turned to Gloria. "I had forgotten, when I said yes to Isabel, that it was your birthday. But you don't mind, do you, if I go?"

"Oh, no," said Gloria. Then she looked quickly at Richard. "Did you want to go? Perhaps she would have asked you, too, if,—if it wasn't for me."

"I go?" Richard was surprised. To Irene he said: "Go, by all means. You like that sort of thing. We'll be all right, Gloria and I. We may possibly go to the theatre. At all events we'll manage to amuse ourselves." So Irene left them.



After she had gone Richard found Gloria's coat for her. "We're going to have a cosy little dinner, just the two of us, and then go to a good play. How does that suit you?"

Said Gloria, "You are sure you didn't want to go with Isabel and Irene?"

"I wasn't asked. Besides, I think it's an awful bore."

"But you told Irene to go," reproachfully.

"Oh, well, that's different. She likes that sort of thing. I suppose it will be very enjoyable, but all the same I'm glad it's not me, you know."

Gloria smiled, too, an elfish little smile, rather like a naughty child. "So am I," she said as he held the door open for her to go through.

As they left the house, Richard, looking back over his shoulder, saw Tom Baldwin standing by the window above them looking out and watching them, a sardonic smile on his lips. With the light behind him he looked rather like Mephistopheles framed against the fires of Hell.

They stood for a moment in the street while Richard called a taxi. As it drew up to the curb to take them in, Tom raised the window above and leaned out.

"Have a good time!" he called after them, but Richard had already closed the door of the taxi with a slam.

## CHAPTER VI

### IN WHICH RICHARD DREAMS

It was an unusually warm day in late February. One of those days when Nature, looking ahead and indulging her casual fancy, gives us a glimpse of what she means to do in a month or so; when, relenting from her sternness of the winter, she sends forth a deceptive softness over the earth. It is not real, but only a smiling prophecy of spring, and none but the very young both of trees and men are deceived by it. Yet its power is sufficient to make the young men dream dreams and their elders see visions.

All day long the wind had crept about the streets and squares, speaking softly of muddy lanes outside the city, of budding trees and far spread rain-drenched fields,—not absolutely convincing, but saying,—“I am coming, I am coming!” People opened reluctant windows and drew in deep breaths of the warm air, and then closed them quickly again, not because it was cold, but because they ought to think it was cold and they feared a touch of influenza.

As the afternoon wore on, there came a hint of rain in the misty air. Gloria, coming home from a kindergarten class where she was studying, found the mellow atmosphere too alluring for her to re-enter the house, and, loth to desert the soft beauty of the day, she seated herself on the low stone porch at the top of the short flight of steps.

The afternoon was just dying into twilight. A misty greyness took the place of the faint rose-hue of the sunset, and a thin moon, looking half-ashamed of being out so early, rode above the tree-tops across the square. There was something dreamily reminiscent in sitting here with the soft wind fanning her temples, something which recalled old half-forgotten dreams and desires of her childhood.

She was still sitting there when Richard came home. He, too, stopped, arrested by the impalpable loveliness of the dusk. He stood just below her, his arms resting on the balustrade, and they talked in desultory phrases, while about them crept the delicate dreaming softness of the London twilight.

Half a block away a servant maid stood at the top of some area steps talking to an enamoured grocer's boy. Her apron was wound about her arms, and the iron railings along the steps cut her off grotesquely in the middle, making her look like a half figure sawed out of wood. Richard called Gloria's attention to her.

"She looks like the figure of Mrs. Noah that I used to have in my Noah's Ark, who unhappily got cut in two just in her prime by being trodden on."

They laughed, but as they watched the unconscious pair, Richard was thinking in his heart: It's good to be simple like that, to snatch a moment here and there from the busy exigencies of life, to creep up from your dull kitchen and meet spring smiling like that from the eyes of some fascinated errand-boy; or to loiter as he is doing, basket in hand, careless alike of the passers-by or of the fast slipping hours, time and duty both forgotten——

"There's the moon!" Gloria interrupted his thoughts, "did you see it over your right shoulder? I did."

Richard was gazing absently at the thin silver fragment in the sky.

"A new moon." He paused.

"A crescent moon," Gloria corrected him.

"'A crescent moon for promises,'" Richard quoted.

What promises? And like Gloria's, his mind travelled off in search of vanished fields, and meadows lost long since. His thoughts were long, long thoughts, dreams of his boyhood, hopes and fears and ambitions long slumbering which the soft spring twilight awoke from their sleep. A line of poetry ran in his head:

"And some old dream I had forgotten I seemed to be remembering."

That was what the soft spring dusk meant to him,— dreams and visions——

From very far away there came to him, borne on the lipping breeze across the park, the mocking notes of a hand-organ. Lights began to twinkle delicately in the lilac distance, and here and there a window pane was lighted up.

They looked up at the house next door where, behind the drawn shade, a shadowy figure moved in some obscure activity.

"I used to throw gravel at lighted windows about this time of night when I was a boy." Richard's voice was a little sad with the thoughts of youth long dead.

"We could throw some up now," Gloria suggested mischievously. "It would be a lark! Shall we try it?"

Richard smiled, but they neither of them moved from their places on the steps; the languors of the misty night were too delicious to be disturbed. But there ran through Richard's veins as she spoke an old longing for the lost joys of yesterday.

And at the same moment, as if in counterpart of his old-time self, a small boy appeared in the enchanted distance, hands in pockets, whistling as he walked. And in Richard's ears it waked an old tune of remembered graces, of dim lovely dreams, and vanished ambitions lost in the great complexities of human life.

He looked at Gloria. He saw her vaguely through a veil of old aspirations. She seemed to him to be but a part of the dusk and the night, as much a part of it as the misty moon riding in the heavens. She was light and darkness both in one.

The mellow evening closed in on them. The little servant maid had long since left her enamoured grocer and retired to her lighted dungeon below stairs, the whistling boy had vanished into the velvety gloom and the presumptuous barrel organ ceased its clatter. Yet the dreams stayed with Richard, dumbly haunting him with a sweet, intangible offer.

It was there for him to grasp,—something—something— His lost boyhood perhaps. What must he do to seize it?

Like a flower the dusk blossomed into night; and presently Irene called to them from the balcony. With slow steps they answered her summons and went in to dinner.

Yet the dream persisted with Richard, and all through the night while the wind rustled the white

muslin curtains at the windows, and Irene lay beside him, her white arms tossed above her head, restless, perhaps, with the unusual heat, the thought still pursued him.

## CHAPTER VII

### SPRING

SUSAN BIXBY's eldest child was ill. Joe had come early on the Saturday and asked if Irene would come over to the house with him. Susan was in a bad state. She'd been up with the boy for the last three nights. She wasn't very well herself. There was reason to believe that another little Bixby would make its arrival next autumn, and that had upset Susan, too.

It was too bad Susan couldn't have had this year free, Joe grumbled in the cab on the way over. It did seem rather as if they had more than their share of ill-luck. Five children already were enough, he complained. And just at this time, too! It did not occur to him to assume any of the responsibility for the state of affairs. It was a habit of Joe Bixby's to lay everything to luck. "Such miserable luck as I always have!" he was wont to drill into Susan's sympathetic ear.

He found Irene less responsive to his appeals. She was inclined to brush over Joe's troubles and to be more interested in Tony's state.

"How long had the fever been running?" she asked, and looked thoughtful when Joe said he didn't know exactly, but for several days at least. Susan, he said, was half mad with anxiety and lack of sleep.

"You ought to have sent for me before," Irene said. Although she was no nurse, she had gone readily when Joe asked her. Richard had been inclined to make ex-

cuses for her but she had stopped him. And Joe had said, when Richard expostulated saying that Irene knew nothing about sickness, and suggesting that they send for a nurse, that it would do Susan good just to have her there. He had gone, he said, first for Sharlie but she was busy; had some kind of a fool commission on hand and either couldn't or wouldn't come (and Joe thought the latter). He added that he thought Susan would rather have Irene anyway. She was so calm and restful, and that was what Susan needed more than anything. Sharlie, he said, often made her nervous.

In a way it pleased Irene to be found so useful. She felt almost flattered by the fact of Joe's coming to her. It was complimentary, too, to have Susan fall on her neck in the way she did when they finally arrived at Camden Town. Susan burst into tears of gratitude as soon as she saw Irene. It made Irene feel a little uncomfortable, but it was nevertheless gratifying.

She found Tony worse than she had expected. Irene had always liked the little boy. There had been times when, regretting the fact of her own childlessness, the hazy idea of offering to adopt the little youngster had vaguely crossed her mind. Not that she had ever suggested such a thing to anyone, even to Richard!

"You ought to have sent for me before," she told Susan also. With a rather pleasant assumption of authority she ordered the distraught mother into bed and took charge of the sick-room herself. Susan obeyed her meekly, after exacting a promise from Irene that she should be called at once if there was any change in the child's condition.



Irene rearranged the shutters, pulling back the curtains, and then sat down in the big chair by the side of the bed. Susan had tearfully brought her a book to read, but the room was too dark to read in comfort and she decided it would be better just to sit there and watch. Irene liked to be quiet and the boy didn't need much care; just someone to be near to change the ice-bag on his head at intervals and to encourage the fretful, fitful sleep.

As she sat with folded hands beside the bed, Irene was really quite happy. The room was quiet save for the occasional turning of the boy's form in the bed, and the gentle buzzing of a solitary fly in the far corner of the room over by the window. Irene felt very contented and happy, at peace with the world.

Outside the sun crept over the housetops and down the other side of the street. Susan, worn out with fatigue, slept on. The overworked maid came once or twice to the door to see if she wanted anything, and the doctor called once.

Irene sat still in her chair. She heard the other children come home from school, but Joe kept them out of the way down below and fairly quiet.

The day slipped into afternoon. The sun's rays grew more and more level. She had to change the slant of the shutters in order to keep out too much light. It mustn't shine in on the bed.

The street outside was bathed in mellow sunlight. She saw what a perfect day it was, but she did not regret having to be here in the close little room. She did not even regret the walk she and Richard and Gloria had planned for the afternoon and were to have taken together. They would get along without her.

She went back to the bed and passed her cool hand

over the little boy's feverish forehead. He sighed restfully and turned over. He appeared a little more comfortable than he had been. Irene refilled the ice-bag from the bowl on the dresser and sat down again content.

Richard and Gloria, alighting from a north-bound bus, struck off side by side at right angles to the road. A few steps brought them to the open country. They walked along a little path between stiff hedgerows of hawthorn, a secluded spot seemingly miles from human surroundings. As they emerged from the high hedge which shut in the path, Gloria paused and drew in her breath.

The valley lay stretched before them, a blaze of colour. To their right wide fields of buttercups dotted here and there with patches of pale blue star-like blossoms rolled away for mile on mile. On the slope of a far hill a man was ploughing. His sturdy "gee-up" came to them now and again when the end of the furrow was reached. A dog, poised for an instant in outline against the sky, could be seen at the top of the hill.

There seemed to be no sound save the humming of the insects in the grass.

"How still it is," said Richard.

For a little while they stood silent, listening. Then Richard said: "We might as well go through here." He led the way through a little wicket gate and down the gently inclined path to a break in the woods.

A deep lane here, where the branches of the trees met and intertwined over their heads. Richard went ahead and from time to time held aside the long briars of the underbrush and the tendrils of wild grape which

had grown across the way. The faint, evanescent scent of the wild grape blossoms came to them, delicately sweet and elusive. One could never be quite sure when it was there and when it was gone, but there was something about it that made Gloria's heart beat unevenly. She found herself almost wishing it would not come, even while she searched for it.

"How did you know about this,—the lane, I mean?" she asked.

"Oh, I used to come here when I was a boy," Richard replied. "I wondered if I should be able to find it again. It hasn't changed much since then, although it's thicker than it was and the bushes aren't as high as I remembered them. You didn't have to stoop then."

"I don't now," said Gloria and Richard laughed.

"We ought to come to the clearing pretty soon. At least I always called it a clearing. It's a pine woods really, but it seems so open after this. Rather lovely. It ought to be somewhere along here."

They came upon it even as he spoke, a rustic temple of serried columns roofed with transparent lacy boughs of delicate green, the ground below thick-carpeted with the soft brown needles. Coming as they did from the tangled undergrowth of the lane, the feeling of spaciousness was intensified.

"Oh, how lovely!" Gloria exclaimed.

To the right the woods extended up a long slope like a wall, shutting off all but a glimpse of blue sky through the branches. On the other side it followed a line of stone cliffs dropping off suddenly to the valley beneath. Looking out over this valley between the intervening tree boles, they could see a stretch of undulating fields. Separated by the intervening aisle

of trees it appeared remote, unreal and unattainable, like the exquisite landscapes sometimes seen in dreams or reflected in the compass of a mirror.

Gloria looked about her at the tree-enshadowed amphitheatre.

"Let's stop here," she suggested.

"It isn't too damp?" Richard asked.

"Oh, no." She sank down at the foot of one of the biggest trees. In her grey tweed suit and her grey tam o' shanter she blended into the wood colouring like some wood nymph hiding at a mortal's approach. Something of the sort occurred to Richard and he wanted to express it in words, but all he said,—looking at her neat high boots the while,—was something about most women not knowing how to dress sensibly for a walk.

It came to him with a touch of irritation, how in the early days of their marriage Irene had once gone for a walk with him in high-heeled slippers. Irene had admitted her mistake and had never repeated the offence, but that particular walk had been spoiled.

But Gloria interrupted his thoughts. She was gazing off at the valley beyond the trees.

"How could you ever have found such a perfect place?"

"You like it?" he asked. He had stretched himself out on the ground beside her, watching her while he sifted the cool pine needles through his fingers.

"Yes," she answered, "only it all looks so far away, so unattainable. Surely one could never really touch those fields. And that isn't a real man ploughing. It must be all a trick of the imagination."

"Perhaps it's like the Islands of the Blest, or the Ultima Thule,—the perfect picture." The pine

needles were soft under his touch. He buried his hands under them, lifting them in his hands and watching them slide through like drops of water. "You like it?" he asked again.

"Oh, I love it!" she exclaimed, and added, "It's a pity Irene had to miss it."

"Yes," agreed Richard absently, and looked away. He felt somehow glad that Irene had not come. He tried to explain away the feeling by looking again at Gloria's boots and remembering that other walk which had been such a fiasco. Besides, Irene tired soon. She was a bit heavy for walking.

But Gloria had not noticed his preoccupation. She was gazing out again over the valley. "We could surely never reach it," she said again thoughtfully.

"Shall we put it to the test?" he asked. "It is real country, you know."

Gloria smiled. "It would vanish at once if we attempted it."

"I'm not so sure," he said. "I believe I've crossed those very fields years ago. It's a good stiff walk, though. Can you go that far?"

"Oh, miles and miles on a day like this," said Gloria. She sprang to her feet.

Richard got up more slowly. "If we go down across the edge of that farthest field, skirting the brook where it crosses that ploughed spot, we ought to find a path on the other side."

Gloria clapped her hands. "Oh, it is real country and you actually know it?"

They struck out into the open. Over their heads a lark's song came shivering down the sky. The sky itself a depth on depth of liquid blue curved over them. And all around was the golden sunshine of afternoon.

A clump of wood-violets grew in their path. Gloria stooped to pluck them and held them out to him. Richard laughed as he took them from her eager fingers.

"Ah, but they won't last!"

His words fell between them like a veil hiding, with its touch of impermanence, their joy in the day. But in an instant their happiness had torn it aside.

Together they breasted the hill that rose before them. From its height they looked about them.

Low on the horizon white clouds, like galleons, sailed serenely onward. Over to one side a touch of colour showed where the spires and roofs of a little town nestled in the valley. And at their feet, field after field and meadow beyond meadow glistening in the sun.

Richard gazed at the scene which long ago had been familiar to him; and again he felt the same call, the same urge of youth which he had felt on that mild February evening when he and Gloria had sat together in the mist-hung street.

But Gloria was pressing on down the slope once more. He watched the backward push of her knees as her feet spurned the moist ground beneath her, and the careless grace of her walk, like a young boy's carriage. He ran ahead and caught up with her.

"There's a line in the *Odyssey* that always comes back to me on a day like this. Do you remember it? It's in the fourth book, if I remember rightly. 'And my heart laughed within!'"

She turned her radiant face to his. "It's good sometimes just to be alive, isn't it? How one ought to pity the poor dead."

"Come," he said. "This is the way."

And then once more they were in the wood, a light

wood this time, of beech and alders raising their tall stems heavenwards. The light flickered on the dappled ground. The leaves fluttered over their heads. Sounds of a farmyard came, softened by distance,—the soft cooing of pigeons and a tinkle of sheep-bells. They heard the sweet fluting call of mating birds above them and the warm breeze stirred the bracken, sending forth a delicate odour of sap. They could feel it running in the trees about them.

And while the riotous spring laughed in joy a hush fell on them. Richard drew a little nearer and they sat there listening to the murmurous saga of the forest. They were so quiet that a squirrel ran out and seized its little dole of food almost within reach of their hands. The primordial forces of nature were at work, though these two did not guess all that it meant.

"Ah," said Richard after a long golden silence, "it's good to be here far from all the taunts and worries of London life. Here there are no prying Baldwins, no unfriendly ears, no gossiping tongues. You're glad to be here, Gloria? Tell me you're glad."

She nodded but did not speak, and Richard drew a shade nearer. She looked up then, a little frightened.

"Gloria, you're not afraid of me?"

"Oh, no, no, but of course not, Richard."

They were silent again. And slowly the long golden afternoon drew to its close.

It was late when they reached home, yet Irene had not yet arrived. A fire burning in the morning room seemed a good thing in the rapidly chilling dusk. Seated deep in the high-backed sofa with cushions behind their backs, for they were pleasantly conscious of fatigue, with the tea table drawn up before them,

they waited Irene's arrival. They had finished tea, which Martha had providentially kept hot for them, and were idly passing away the time, the empty cups pushed back but still littering the table which Martha had not yet come to clear. There was no other light than the flickering fire.

Richard's arm was along the back of the sofa; they were close together. Their attitude was that of lovers. Very gradually Richard's arm slipped down from the stuffed back of the couch, slipped down to Gloria's shoulders, and then tightened, holding her close to him. His lips were close to her cheek—And at that moment Irene entered the room.

She was still in her coat and hat, a small hat, the one Gloria had helped her buy, and she looked very tired. There were dark circles under her eyes and a strained look about her mouth. She stopped short in the doorway, seeing Gloria and Richard sitting there in the corner of the sofa; and the sudden stiffening of her body warned them that she had seen.

The two on the sofa had drawn apart. Richard recovered himself first. He rose to his feet and walked across the room to the fireplace, turning on the lights in the room.

"You're late. And you look tired. How's Tony?" he asked carelessly.

Irene looked even more tired in the brilliant light than she had before. Her eyes travelled to the window where the shades were still undrawn and the trees in the square opposite faintly visible.

Her eyes came back to the room and rested on nothing.

"Tony's dead," she replied dully.



## CHAPTER VIII

### A LITTLE DINNER AT SIMEON'S

IRENE sat in her bedroom before the Louis XVIth dressing-table, putting the finishing touches to her costume.

The light from the softly-shaded electric candles in their silver-gilt wall brackets gleamed on her bare shoulders and the rich fabric of her gown. It was a new gown and a decidedly pretty one. Irene regarded her image in the long glass with a little smile of satisfaction. Richard would come in presently; would he compliment her on her looks, she wondered? Then she blushed at her own boldness. Yet she was acutely conscious of a desire to hear his approval.

At present he was in his dressing-room just beyond. She could hear him moving about in there and humming the Duke's song from "Rigoletto." As she sat there idly regarding her reflection in the glass, it came to her quite poignantly how pleasant was this intimacy of married life.

She had laid everything out in readiness for him. Could she have overlooked anything? If she had, he would appear at the door presently and demand it in that lovingly tyrannical way of his. But she didn't think she had forgotten anything this time. She would have liked to go in just to make sure that he had everything to his hand, but at the same time she liked to sit here doing nothing, or perhaps pretending,

with a little touch of her hand here or a smoothing down there, that she was busy with her own toilette.

As a matter of fact she had been fully ready this half hour. Irene was always more than punctual, and somehow she had looked forward to this dinner at Simeon's with more than ordinary pleasure. Consequently she had dressed early. It was pleasant to be going out like this in a new and fashionable gown to a large house where would be lights and music and wine, accompanied by a handsome husband. Richard was very handsome. She often realised that more acutely when he was among other men, as he would be to-night.

The song from "Rigoletto" ceased and after an interval, which Irene rightly guessed to be devoted to the buttoning of his collar, the Spinning-wheel Song from "Martha" took its place.

Richard always sang when he was dressing; that is if everything was going well. He was evidently not going to appear at the door to-night to demand anything. She had been a little anxious about the new studs. They were the ones Peter had given Richard last Christmas and they didn't go in as easily as the old ones. And Richard did so dislike an innovation of any sort. And these new studs of Peter's were quite an innovation. But then it had been an unaccustomed honour that Peter should have remembered Richard at Christmas time at all. Hildegarde said it was because Richard had saved some money for the old man, advising him to buy or not to buy such and such a stock. Irene didn't know whether it was true or not. But Peter would be there to-night, so of course she had had to put those studs in the

She began to speculate as to the guests. Peter would be there, and Sarah, and probably the Tom Baldwins, which with Simeon and Isabel and her husband would make seven besides herself and Richard. But in all probability no one else of the family. Certainly she knew of several who had not been invited.

And now a little unruly dark imp which had lain dormant in Irene's mind for some time, began to peep out and show itself, only to be chased back and told to hide itself again. But its momentary appearance had given a faint unmistakable clue to some of Irene's satisfaction in to-night's party.

Several times lately, she had had to suppress the rebellious little thought, sending it back sternly to the limbo of unadmitted things. It was like something hidden away in a trunk which one doesn't take out and examine, but which one knows is there. Occasionally when Irene, so to speak, went to put other things away in the cupboard of her mind, she could not help just glancing at the obscure little fact. She did so to-night.

And the fact, we are now forced to confess, was that Gloria had not been bidden to the party. But Irene did not really admit the truth of this; she knew it to be unworthy of her. In point of fact she didn't admit anything at all,—except that, well——

It wasn't that Irene didn't enjoy Gloria's companionship. It was nice to have her there when Richard was gone, but there was something just the least bit trying in always taking her about with them. They were three now where they used to be two. That was why Irene was going to enjoy to-night so much. It would be like old times, just she and Richard going somewhere together.

For when the three of them went anywhere, it always seemed as if all Richard's time was taken up with looking after Gloria. Irene often felt very much alone. It wasn't that Gloria was the clinging sort; she wasn't. Quite the contrary. She was far more independent than Irene; and it was just that almost blatant independence that made it necessary for Richard to look after her more than he did Irene. Gloria was so independent that sometimes she seemed just a bit *gauche*. It was, in truth, partly shyness, Irene thought, that made her like that. But one was never quite sure what she might do or say.

Perhaps Richard felt that too; at any rate he always seemed to feel obliged to hover near. Irene was sure Richard must be as conventional as herself. Irene herself had poise. Perhaps Gloria would gain it after a time; she was very young, of course. But anyway to-night it would be pleasant to feel that neither she nor Richard need take any responsibility.

Irene's pleasure suffered a slight check when Richard, in the hall, remarked: "It's odd Simeon didn't invite Gloria. A damned shame, I think it is!" But she forgot it before they reached Simeon's big house in Hill Street.

It was a slight disappointment, too, to find at the table that she had Tom Baldwin on her right hand. She disliked him intensely. On the other side of her was old Mr. Truman. Isabel Hartley, Simeon's daughter, who was also his housekeeper, knew that no one would be so patient as Irene with his interminable stories. Besides it would relieve Irene of all necessity for talking herself, and it was well known that Irene talked but little. Irene would be nice to the old man, so Isabel had assured herself when she

arranged the table, for Isabel was one of those vicariously charitable people who enjoy seeing one person kind to another, though they wouldn't take the trouble themselves for worlds. Irene, she knew, would nod her lovely head and encourage the old man, while she smiled her slow smile. Isabel, who prided herself on her tact in dinner-giving, was quite pleased with the arrangement.

And she had meant to be kindly in giving Irene Tom on the other side, as a foil to old Mr. Truman. Isabel considered her brother the wittiest man in London. And (she meant to tell Irene later) he had asked to sit there.

Beyond Tom, sat Sharlie Baldwin. Tom didn't like her, and had objected strongly when Isabel showed him her plan of the table. But Isabel had told him that he couldn't have Irene unless he took Sharlie as well. "The sweet with the sour," she had said, imitating Tom's own style of wit.

Tom didn't like Sharlie because she snubbed him. Sharlie, who was very modern and advanced, had been at Roedean and Somerville and later had a flat of her own in Chelsea, where she pretended to paint or to write, as the spirit moved her, and was intimate in a set quite unknown and foreign to the Baldwin world. Sharlie also was said to be witty. Hers was not the blustering humour of Tom but it had a keener edge. Tom used the blunt side of his wit; Sharlie only stabbed occasionally, but when she did it was the sharp point itself which entered her victim. Her brilliancy in repartee was something of a tradition in the family, but they thought her cold and hard-hearted.

They had no knowledge of her little weaknesses and of how hard she struggled to keep a place for herself

in that sea of fluctuating popularity, Society, where, if she isn't very careful, a single woman unblessed with brothers or other male attendants is very likely to disappear from view. They none of them knew when they saw her hair, dressed with a studied carelessness, how long she had worked to make the carefully arranged locks fall over her forehead in just that way to hide the gradually thinning hair at her temples, or how, now that she was getting older, that life in the little Studio in Chelsea which she described with so much spirit and which they all thought so delightfully and dangerously fast, was beginning to pall on her. If she was at times a little bitter who could blame her?

Sharlie had thin lips and the cold grey eyes of the Baldwins, a rather long thin nose and a bony neck with which she had much trouble when wearing evening dress. She was supposed to be very carefree and independent, and also a bit of a man-hater.

To-night as they sat down to dinner, Tom ignored her altogether. He gave his entire attention to Irene.

"How's the little flapper getting on?" he asked in a pause of the meal.

"Do you mean Gloria?" Irene turned her calm eyes in his direction. "She is quite well, thank you."

"Haven't seen her," continued Tom, "since I ran into them at the theatre the other night. Good show, that, at the York. Jolly little party they were having, Richard and the flapper, I mean. What was the matter, didn't you care for what they were giving there? You weren't there; I wondered. Rather good show, I thought."

Irene said nothing. She did not want Tom to see that his news was a surprise to her. No doubt it was

all right, but she felt a queer little pain at the bottom of her heart, a kind of resentment, as if she had been purposely left out, shut off from some pleasure. Of course it was all right, but it was odd that Richard had said nothing about it,—that neither of them, he nor Gloria, had mentioned the event.

She looked across the table, where Richard was eagerly conversing with his neighbour, a tall, fair woman, on whose ample shoulders the firm white flesh rested like a cloak. And a sudden doubt assailed her. She put it from her, however, and turned again to old Mr. Truman on her left.

He had been telling her an anecdote of his University days for the last fifteen minutes and, being near-sighted, hadn't noticed that she was not listening. Irene laboriously gathered up the threads of his story.

Yet even after she had learned what it was he was talking about, she could not keep her attention fixed on the story. Her long-anticipated pleasure in the party had suddenly evaporated. It had disappeared the moment Tom had spoken of that clandestine visit to the theatre,—for it must have been clandestine, otherwise they would have mentioned it.

She answered mechanically the questions which Tom put to her from time to time; and at length, by partially turning her shoulder towards him, gave the appearance of listening intently to old Mr. Truman on the other side. For she could not bear to talk to her husband's cousin longer. The instinctive distaste which she had always felt for him ripened suddenly into actual dislike. She felt that the old man on her left was a benefactor to-night in not demanding more from her in the way of conversation than the occasional nodding of her head.

By the end of the dinner, however, she had herself well in hand. She told herself that she had been absurd, childish, to feel as she had about Tom's casual remark. Yet it haunted her, that little indiscreet word of his,—indiscreet, was it? or malicious? There struck across her consciousness the first icy wave of fear, she knew not yet what of.

She meant to say nothing of what she had learned by chance that night. Almost simultaneously with Tom's announcement she had come to that conclusion,—that she must never mention what he had said, to Richard. Yet in the cab going home, she found it difficult to avoid. They spoke of Tom, but very incidentally. Flora, Tom's wife, had been at the party, very much over-dressed. Flora, poor thing, realised that she was not of the Baldwins, and had never really been accepted by them although she was asked to their parties. So she had, in her own vulgar way, tried to "show them," when the opportunity came. She had worn a most preposterous dress at the dinner. Even Richard had noticed it, and spoke of it on the way home.

But Irene was unusually silent. She had almost no comment to make on anything that had occurred.

The moment she had been trying to avoid came as they stood under the hall light on their way up the stairs, after the taxi had deposited them in Prince's Gate. Richard, stooping, had picked up Gloria's tennis racquet which she had left lying carelessly in the hall propped up against the stairs. The sight of it brought the girl back to Richard's mind.

"Poor little Gloria! I wonder how she got along to-night. I do think it was rotten of Isabel not to



ask her to dinner, too. Why do you suppose they left her out?"

"Perhaps they didn't want her." Irene's voice was cold and a little petulant. She was tired and her nerves had been considerably tried already.

But Richard did not, or would not, heed the faint danger signal. "But why shouldn't they want her? Besides, they had plenty of room. If they could have that ridiculous Flora, I am sure they might have found place for Gloria."

"Flora is Simeon's daughter-in-law."

"True enough, and I've no objection to her being there. She appears to behave herself, even if she does dress like a Comanche Indian. But that doesn't excuse Gloria's not being invited. Now that I think of it, it really seems a bit insulting, their leaving her out in that pointed way. I'm sorry I went myself."

With a hand of ice at her heart, Irene said: "It's a pity you didn't take her with you in my place since her presence everywhere seems so important to you."

Richard looked at her sharply. "Why do you say that? Does it mean anything in particular?"

The way was open for Irene to mention the little theatre party of which Tom had told her, but she fought down the impulse to speak of it. Instead she said:

"I had no idea she meant so much to you. I am afraid I am not so enthusiastic, myself. For I really cannot see any reason why Isabel should have had her there to-night if she didn't wish it."

"Do you mean that you don't like Gloria?" he asked coldly.

With a slight twinge of remorse, Irene hastened to soften her former words.

"Oh, no, it isn't that. Only it seems to me that the arrangement we've made has not been an unqualified success. I can't help feeling very often that Gloria has no real confidence in me, is not in sympathy——"

Richard gazed meditatively up the stairs, seeing the familiar scene of his own house with unaccustomed eyes. Then abruptly he reached for the electric switch to turn off the lights.

"It's your lack of sympathy," he said, and hated himself as he said it.

Later that night Irene awoke. She drew closer to Richard's side. "Love me, Richard," she whispered.

In the morning she blushed at the remembrance of her boldness.

And Richard, too, was puzzled. Always before it had been he who besought. She had always acquiesced, he could not recall any time that she had refused him, but it had been he who took the initiative. And he wondered.

## CHAPTER IX

### IN WHICH SIMEON MAKES DISCOVERIES

SIMEON BALDWIN walked along the edge of the Green Park on his way to Peter's in Lowndes Square. It was a fresh June afternoon and he had walked across from his house in Hill Street because Peter had telephoned over that he wanted to see him.

Peter was in trouble, having some dispute with an unruly tenant who wouldn't get out when he'd had warning. The man, it seems, was insolent. Thought he had some kind of a lease. Perhaps he had, Peter was careless about these things. Anyway he ought not to have antagonized the man until he was certain where he stood. No kind of policy in doing that. But that was Peter all over. Always getting into some kind of a row, usually without a leg to stand on, and then sending for Simeon, as his lawyer, to come and straighten him out. . . .

Simeon walked briskly, swinging his light malacca cane, which had a curved ivory handle. He was not a robust man like his brothers, Peter and Matthew, but he carried his sixty-odd years well. His dress and his boots were the quintessence of neatness.

He was a pale man with cold grey eyes, a thin, hawk-like nose and lips so pale as to almost non-existent. At the sides of his pale pendulous cheeks he wore just the faintest suspicion of side-whiskers.

Simeon walked just a little stiffly. His health, none too robust by nature, had been carefully shielded and

improved by science, but the last winter had nevertheless left him with a touch of rheumatism. Not that Simeon ever exercised himself over his health the way poor Nathan had done. He was too calm and too clever for that. Only he had to be careful. It was his constant though unexpressed fear that things might occur to worry him, to disturb that identical calm in which, for years, he had wrapped himself like a cloak.

It occurred to him, as he walked along the park, particularly green and inviting on this most unusually fine day, that it might be pleasant to go on a little further and stop for a moment to visit his niece in Prince's Gate. He had not been there in some time and this seemed a good opportunity. Peter was expecting him, but it was still early and Peter could wait. He could easily spare a half hour's chat with Irene.

He liked Irene. She was quiet and did not disturb his inward sense of the fitness of things. There was nothing modern or fast about Irene. Simeon detested fastness in a woman. And in these days his sensibilities seemed to be always getting shocked. What with his own son Tom, and that terrible girl of Matthew's, that Sharlie! No one could tell what the world was coming to.

Of course this craze for modernism was much better in a man than in a girl. But Simeon was shrewd enough to see that of the two Sharlie had the better brain. Simeon had no illusions about his son. Indeed he held for him a secret contempt. Tom was an ass, clever, witty sometimes, but nevertheless, an ass! Simeon dismissed him without much thought. Long ago he had taken Tom's measurements and found him wanting.

When he reached the thin grey house in Prince's

Gate where Richard and Irene lived, he paused for a moment to examine its exterior. A great bargain, that. Richard had bought it comparatively cheap,—it was rather in disrepair at the time,—and had put it in condition. Very neat and trim they kept it too; ought to be worth three or four times what he paid for it. The chap had a head on him. He walked up to the sturdy green-painted door and rang the bell.

Martha answered his summons. Irene, it appeared, was at home, so after dusting his boots carefully in the hall, Simeon allowed himself to be led upstairs and ushered into the drawing-room.

The room with its large dignified proportions, its air of restrained elegance combined with comfort, impressed Simeon on entering, just as it had done many times before. Wonderful taste, he told himself, wonderful taste that woman had. His own drawing-room in Hill Street, although the furnishings were twice as costly, wasn't half as attractive as this.

Irene was in the far corner, sitting in a low chair by the window overlooking the little park where the trees, in the full glory of summer, swayed and rustled in the breeze.

A skein or two of bright-coloured worsted on which she was knitting made a vivid spot against her dark gown. She rose as Simeon crossed the room towards her, and stood waiting, with the bright-hued worsted held against her breast, until he reached her side. Simeon noticed that she did not come forward as another woman, more impulsive, might have done, but waited for him to come to her. It was a large part of her charm, this repose of manner.

She put out her hand to him and the faintest of blushes just tinged her cheeks. Simeon noted this, too,

with approval. At last that takes it as a compliment when a young woman desires to talk. It touched some secret chord of sympathy long buried under the dry accumulation of years.

He pulled at a chair beside her in the window, and carefully placing his stick and hat, in which were deposited his gloves, began to look upon the floor beside him as deposited himself to enjoy the half-hour of her society which he had purchased himself.

There was silence for a few minutes after the first conventionalities had been exchanged. With one slight act of studied delicacy over the other, the corners of his trousers running in perfect lines down their length. Simon sat, always in the arms of his chair, and deliberately regarded his mistress over the rim of his meticulously polished fingers. Yes, there was a very satisfactory acquiescence in the family. There was no more to dispute about her, for she knew how to make a man comfortable, make him feel in his ease, so to speak, without his ever noticing the fact.

There was it is true, no other of signs, and this, while it improved him in some respects, also rather pleased him. Irene, he rejoiced to see, was of the old school of gentlewomen. She permitted, but did not encourage the habit of smoking in her drawing-room. Simon scarcely felt the absence of his customary afternoon cigar in his contemplation of Irene. There was a deference about her manner, particularly towards her husband's inclines, which was very gratifying to Simon. One felt not only that it was pleasant to be here in the cool, attractive drawing-room, but that at the same time, in some delicate way, one was conferring a highly valued favour. It is a pleasant and comforting way, this, that Irene gave one.

Simeon told her of a picture he had recently bought. It had caught his attention in a small second-hand shop in Charing Cross Road. It bore no signature at present, but one had obviously been painted over on the canvas. And it had an unmistakable resemblance to some of Turner's earlier work. So he had bought it. A mere speculation, of course, but then it *might* turn out to be the real thing. It was at his picture-dealer's now being repaired. He'd let her know the result of their investigations.

Irene was very sympathetic. The story of the picture interested her greatly. She scarcely said a word,—it was Simeon who talked. But she appeared to listen attentively, and that is a great art. Simeon had never found a woman who listened so intelligently. He was sometimes surprised to find out how much he had talked. He couldn't have any conversation like this with Isabel, for instance.

There were occasional silences but never any awkward pauses. Once or twice he had just fancied that she seemed a little distrait. Simeon gave it but a passing notice, however. She was looking a trifle pale, too. She had been helping Susan Bixby through her recent trouble and doubtless she was feeling a bit knocked up from it. Too sympathetic she was, a great deal. But a noble woman! Simeon, who at heart, in spite of his cynicism, was an incorrigible sentimentalist, believed firmly in the charming myth of woman's friendship for woman.

But she mustn't wear herself out. That would never do.

"You've been taking too much responsibility on your shoulders," he said. "It won't do, you know, to imperil your health. We must have a care to that."

Irene only smiled vaguely and shook her head. "I am not at all tired," she assured him. "And I was very fond of Tony," she added.

Simeon nodded sympathetically. He felt a passing regret that Irene should have had no children. Too bad, he thought; she would have made a good mother.

He ventured on a few generalities, discussed a topic for a few minutes and then lapsed again into silence. He didn't feel a great deal like talking. It was soothing sitting here in the cool shadowed drawing-room with a pretty woman, gazing idly out at the sun-bespattered square, with its trees like a leafy green veil dropped beyond the windows. Very pleasant indeed; very pleasant and soothing.

Good that Irene required so little of one in the way of conversation. She was a woman who was not afraid of silences. She never pressed one to talk, even though she knew how to listen so well. She wasn't, for instance, like that tiresome Sharlie, who was always prying into one's views on this or that subject of no possible importance. Irene, for instance, could hear about a picture or a statue without instantly demanding concomitant facts in the way of dates and a complete biography of the artist; and then, if you ventured to apprise her, differing with you vociferously and telling you at the end that you were all wrong. There was nothing of this sort about Irene. One, seeking a cause of complaint against her, might call her static. What was it Tom had once said? That she "settled."

He looked at Irene critically over his hawk-like nose and raised finger tips. No, he didn't see it. He really couldn't say there was anything heavy about her. She was static, that was all.



And from outside the raised windows, delicate sounds softened by distance floated in, cries of children at play over in the park, hidden from sight by the thick foliage, the occasional chirping of a sparrow or the whirring of a taxi past the house.

Simeon stretched his legs out, recrossing them with great deliberation so as not to disarrange the meticulous creases in his smooth grey trousers. He ran his hand over his smooth heavy chin with its faint bluish tinge, and opened another topic.

A communicative mood came upon him and he began to talk to Irene upon really sacred subjects, of stocks and bonds and what he thought of this or that investment. He told her how he had disposed of certain parts of his money. Never before in all his austere life had he talked like this to a woman.

And then, all at once, he saw that she was not listening. It was quite apparent that she no longer heard the intimate revelations he was making. She was staring out of the window before her, and although she made no sound, there was an obvious change in her whole attitude.

For a moment Simeon could not believe his eyes. He was dumfounded. Then he followed the direction of her gaze. He even leaned forward in his chair to get a better view of what occupied her attention, and so engrossed was Irene that she failed to notice his action. And Simeon, staring out of the window with her, saw Richard and Gloria walking along the elm-shadowed opposite side of the street.

They were conversing earnestly, seemingly lost in the joy of one another's companionship, yet even these signs of intimacy might not have made things plain to

the astute Simeon had it not been for Irene's attitude of strained attention.

Simeon slightly lowered the lids of his pale grey eyes and watched her silently.

When the two below had crossed the street before the house and disappeared from the view of the upper windows, she turned once more to her guest.

"What were you saying? That you do not approve of investments in foreign securities?"

Simeon answered her questions without betraying any knowledge that the flow of his eloquence had been interrupted, but without the personal touch which had been present in his conversation hitherto. He was deep in the subject of foreign securities when the guilty pair they had seen below, walked into the room.

The girl's face was flushed, her eyes shining, and about her whole body was a kind of nimbus of radiance. Her hair seemed still to hold the warm touch of the sun, her very motions were instinct with the joy of life.

And Richard? Simeon looked at him in turn, but all he saw was a sort of puzzled look, a questioning, and a kind of daring overlaid with an affectation of calm. At once he began a casual explanation:

"We met over by the Marble Arch. The queerest chance it was. And the day was so lovely we decided to walk home. It was quite ripping in the park, wasn't it, Gloria?"

She turned and looked at him. Simeon looked too, then at Gloria and Irene in turn, and in a flash the inner life of the Richard Baldwins was revealed to him in all its stark nakedness, spread out before him like a book left carelessly open.

Simeon pondered the matter as, having made his

adieu, he walked on down Knightsbridge towards Peter's.

Well, what had he himself said, but that the girl would make trouble! There was in the midst of his cogitations, a certain satisfaction in the fact of his having been proved right. But all the same he was very sorry, very sorry indeed. He must keep a little better eye on Richard down at the office.

Simeon did not, however, mention the matter at Peter's. In fact he made no mention at all of his call on Irene. Yet all the way home he was thinking of it and wondering.

And in his room at home, Richard, too, was thinking.

That walk across the park with Gloria in the warm June sunlight, where the midges floated in the air like thistledown and the air itself was full of soft sweet scents, and the dull roar of London came to them stilled to a monotonous humming like the sullen murmur of bees. That walk, what did it signify? Had it indeed roused in him some dormant emotion, some scheme of things forgotten?

He tried to scoff at himself, to allay an awakening fear which Gloria's sweet sensuous presence had stirred up. "We're a hard race, we Baldwins," he told himself. "You can't read romance or poetry into us; it's not there. We were meant to collect our little eight per cents and not to dabble in any softer emotions than the joy of getting the best of our neighbours." So he said, and all the time, deep below the surface of his mind, there ran a little current of mingled fear and delight, a half-hidden, half-revealed speculation,—a promise, which he was unable to still.

In vain he put it from him, deriding himself, and

asking himself scornful questions. Who was he to prove a veritable John o' Dreams? To go a-thirsting after love like a mere stripling! Was he then to prove false to Irene? to the woman he had married? the woman he loved?

And then there was the answer. "Not guilty," said his soul. "Not guilty!" And the years in him were calling out to the youth of her. "Not guilty," his soul whispered, "not guilty!"

## CHAPTER X

### ISABEL COMPLETES THE EVIDENCE

SIMEON BALDWIN made no mention at Peter's of his visit or the discovery which he had made that afternoon at his nephew Richard's. But he did tell his daughter that evening, that he thought the situation there was ripening for trouble.

"You mark my words, there'll be a blow-up before very long. Things aren't going as smoothly there as people believe."

Isabel Hartley received her father's communication with a certain obscure joy mixed with incredulous wonder. Like many stupid women, she prided herself on her penetration and her acuteness in perceiving the rifts in her neighbour's lutes. And she had observed nothing whatever in the relations of Richard and Irene to justify any such conclusion as her father had apparently reached. Yet she knew her father to be a very astute man. With her eyes thus opened for her, Isabel determined to make the most of her opportunities to find out the truth of the matter.

There exist in the world certain persons whose mission apparently (for they generally have no other occupation) is to disseminate gossip. Isabel Hartley was of this type. Not malicious by nature, they yet contrive to accomplish a good deal of ill in the course of a diligent and all-engrossing search for truth.

In Isabel's delicate features, in her smooth pink and white skin and heavy-lidded eyes, there was no sign of

the insatiable thirst for news-bearing which constantly consumed her. Yet it was her passion, her stock-in-trade, what every one instinctively expected of her.

And she had an enquiring mind. She made it her duty therefore, after hearing her father's tidings, to look in on Irene, the following Tuesday. She stopped ostensibly to ask if Irene wanted to go on with her to Mrs. Mandeville's, whose receiving day it was, and who, she knew, had invited Irene to call. But Mrs. Baldwin, the maid said, was out. Miss Gloria was in the drawing-room; would she go up?

After a second's thought Isabel had herself announced.

Gloria was seated in the window reading a book. She rose to her feet, looking rather surprised at Isabel's entrance, for the latter, up to that moment, had never shown the least interest in her.

"Irene isn't in," she hastened to explain. "Didn't they tell you downstairs? She'll be so sorry to miss you. But won't you sit down?"

"Yes, if I may." And Isabel dropped into a chair, spreading out her voluminous ruffles around her much as a peacock spreads its tail. "But you see I came really as much to see you as Irene."

"Yes?" Gloria looked at her steadily, with a gaze so direct that for a moment, it actually disconcerted the irrepressible Isabel. No saying "Thank you," or "I'm so glad you came"; just that cold little "Yes?"

But quickly recovering herself, Isabel burst into a chatting monologue. She had been so busy of late. What with one thing and another, concerts and balls and dinners, to say nothing of these new little "small and earlies"! Charming affairs. Really she just doted on dancing. But it meant that one reached home so

frightfully late, for in actuality it was only a kind of pretence to call them small, and as for being early,—well, no matter how early they started they were never over before four or five in the morning. And one knew *that* would never do as a steady diet. Yet they were so enjoyable. It was a pity Richard and Irene went out so little now. They used to be so fond of dancing, both of them. And she added carelessly:

"I suppose you and Richard see a great deal of one another now."

Gloria flushed. "What do you mean? We must see one another, since we live in the same house."

Isabel perceived that she had been a trifle clumsy.

"I mean you seem to have such good times together going about to polo games and so forth. How does Irene like it? Doesn't she mind?" Isabel asked artlessly, opening her blue eyes rather wider than usual.

Again Gloria flushed darkly. "I don't know about that. Irene could go too if she wanted to."

Isabel knew that she had fumbled somewhat, but it took a good deal to dampen her courage. She was so very sure of her own cleverness. Hers was the kind of blind acuity which never credits another with a sagacity equal to its own, and she mistook Gloria's directness for stupidity. Like the ostrich with head buried in the sand, she refused to believe that any one could see through her little tricks and artifices. She was not a model of tact. It is not a quality inherent in the Baldwins. Yet with anyone else Isabel might have used more finesse.

"Well, I suppose we're all getting older now. That may account for it. Although I can't help thinking Irene is rather foolish. Now as for myself,—I know I could *never* give up dancing, not until I got old and

crippled and halt and blind. Don't you feel that way? But tell me what does Irene do with herself all day while you and Richard are out enjoying yourselves?"

What Gloria's reply might have been, Isabel was never destined to know, for at that moment Richard himself entered. He too looked surprised on seeing Isabel there. As Isabel said later, "Perhaps he wasn't taken aback!"

He hadn't noted her presence, however, in time to stop what he had started to say to Gloria.

"Where's your racquet, child? I've got the motor below. I'm going to run you out to the club for a game of tennis—" Then only, had he observed Isabel.

With polite solicitation they both invited her to join them. But Isabel, pleading her engagement with Mrs. Mandeville, declined. She tried to be quite distant and haughty, and hoped to impress Richard with this while they waited in the drawing-room together for Gloria to change her shoes upstairs. She felt that she had seen enough to convince her that Simeon was in a great degree right. But in the hall she had a further piece of good luck.

By the simple expedient of dropping her handkerchief and pausing to pick it up, she distinctly overheard Richard say to the maid:

"If we should be a little late, tell Mrs. Baldwin not to wait dinner for us. We may be detained."

Detained! Ah! thought Isabel; and feeling that she had now found out all that she wanted to know, she incontinently dropped poor Mrs. Mandeville, and hastened off to the Aunts' house in Gloucester Terrace instead.

There she was in her element. She looked very wise and knowing. One of her lovers had once told her



that she was unfathomable. In a way he was right, but she was unfathomable simply because there was nothing to fathom. A pool with a hard pebbly bottom close to the surface.

"I've got the strangest thing to tell you," she began almost at once.

Hildegarde peered at her with her near-sighted eyes. Long ago the doctor had ordered glasses for her, but her vanity forbade her wearing them. Now she leaned forward listening. Aunt Letty's deafness also became suddenly less acute.

And Isabel sitting there, like a flower blossoming in the midst of thorns, began her tale. She had never enjoyed herself more in her life.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE CALL OF THE SEA

IT was decided that Irene and Gloria should go down to Rydnor on the twenty-eighth. Rydnor is a small watering-place on the south coast, quiet and unpretentious and not too far distant from London. Richard himself arranged the details. They were to have lodgings in a house, a small cottage farm some little distance from the town itself and close to the sea. Martha, the housemaid, was to go along to look after their needs. The owners of the house, quiet country people, were to inhabit the rear and cook for them. Thus the two women would have protection without unwelcome company.

It all sounded very charming, and many things were hoped of the plan. They were, in short, to carry out Irene's rather timid suggestion that she and Gloria get closer to one another. As a matter of fact, in spite of her somewhat half-hearted efforts, the intimacy between the two women did not grow. Gloria very early in the visit developed a taste for long solitary rambles along the seacoast. Often she was gone the entire day. Unconsciously, also, Irene withdrew within herself. She took to sitting in a favourite spot on the little beach in front of the house, a parasol over her head, her large sombre eyes fixed on the blue-green distances of ocean, and there she would remain for hours wrapped in passive meditation.

What her thoughts were, during those long, lonely

hours, Gloria never knew, never troubled to enquire or even to wonder, probably. Her own life filled her full of thought. A world of dreaming romance held her spellbound, caught up between heaven and earth in an empyrean of wonder. Vague half-pleasant, half-terrible dreams and fancies they were, but not happy. Nor were her rambles on the seacoast happy. The joyous health in her, the radiant youth could not but respond to the thrill of the salt wind blowing against her face, to the sight of the long dunes stretching away grey-green or lilac-blue in the distance, the smell of the sea and the long rolling line of breakers curving over in indolent surprise and wetting her with a sudden dash of spray. These things thrilled her as they had always thrilled her from earliest infancy, but nevertheless there was something lacking, or was it that some unnamed foreign element had crept in, frightening her with its very uncertainty?

Below the strata of her consciousness there ran a vein of indefinite fear, a warning prescience of danger. On the horizon of her existence hovered a little cloud, unnamed yet as to its significance but unmistakably disturbing. It hung still on the horizon, yet daily it might assume threatening proportions. She could still meet Irene's eyes frankly, yet behind her gaze there was a preoccupation. Irene often felt at this time that Gloria was not looking at her but through her; questioning, doubting, a strange look wherein she herself had no part, no recognition.

What was she thinking? Irene's natural timidity forbade her to study the girl except when she was not present. And in her absence it often seemed to Irene that she had overrated the girl's odd manner. So instead of striving to fathom Gloria's emotions, Irene

was content to watch the waves creeping up the lilac beach, their curling tops swelling and diminishing, and the gradual darkening of the colours in the water.

Early in the visit she had turned over to Gloria the management of the house. She felt glad to be free from the burden, slight as it was, for it seemed to her that she wanted time to think. And yet she did not think. It was only a mocking travesty of thought which she achieved in its place.

Richard wrote often enough. He told her the news. How Aunt Letty had been for more than a week now staying with Mrs. Wallace and helping her to nurse Bernadotte, who was ill again; how Susan Bixby's youngest had fallen and broken its arm; that Simeon's house was being redecorated in a most elaborate manner while the family were at Cowes; and that it was whispered that Flora, Tom's wife, was at last expecting——

It was hot in London, he said more than once. Vaguely she seemed to see him sweating under the tiresome exactions of life in the city, and wondered whether he was having the proper kind of food for warm weather; if the servants at home were faithful and looked after his comfort as they should. And once the queer doubt assailed her whether Gloria might not be hearing from him, too.

His letters, which had been such a comfort to her, became suddenly worse than useless. Her mind turned again and again to little scraps of evidence. Something Gloria had said about one of the cousins up in London seemed, under the circumstances of their absence, an unusual bit of knowledge for her to possess. How had she heard it except through Richard?

Irene fought against her jealousy, but things kept

cropping up to nourish her suspicions, to make her feel that certain knowledge on the subject of the letters was essential to her peace of mind. There was really no reason why Richard should not write to Gloria did he wish to do so, and yet she hated the idea of his doing so.

She constructed an elaborate scheme for finding out. It seemed to her imperative that she know. One afternoon when they were together she mentioned an incident which had occurred at a certain Board Meeting in London about which Richard had written her, starting to repeat the scene in detail and then stopping,—

“Oh, but perhaps he told you about it? Did he happen to mention it?”

Gloria's eyes opened. “I haven't heard from him,” she said, studying Irene's face gravely.

Irene coloured suddenly. It seemed to her that Gloria must see through her paltry trick. She rose hurriedly.

“I'll go down to the beach for a little while,” she announced and with the story of Richard's Board Meeting still unfinished, Irene trailed away.

Gloria watched her go in brooding silence. Then she began to pull the leaves from the spray of witch-hazel in her hands. Life seemed to be so flat and colourless. If only Richard were here!

In the second week of their stay Tom Baldwin went down to Rydnor. No one knew exactly why. It could not have been simply for a good time. He said that it was hot in London and he wanted a week-end off, and not having any particular place to go, chose the little fishing town where his cousin's family were stopping. It sounded, perhaps, logical enough, but to have left Flora behind, gasping in the heat of Lon-

ness. In his unballasted mind there was doubtless some obscure motive for the course he took. His was a queer nature; his mental vision twisted and bent at times, at others clear as crystal, seeing with his father's penetration, straight to the heart of things.

So he went on describing his visit and enhancing the details. Their culmination was reached when he met Richard one morning outside the Law Courts.

"Been having a particularly jolly time with your people down at Rydnor," Tom accosted him. Richard returned his greeting abstractedly.

"Awfully jolly place," continued Tom, falling in beside Richard and entering the building with him. "Ripping part of the coast, that, and no end jolly things to do down there."

"Really?" said Richard. He stood regarding Tom with the speculative gaze he always reserved for this particular cousin. From boyhood Tom had been odious to him. Even at school (they had been at St. Paul's together), the lad had been a sneaking hypocrite, always borrowing money or seeking aid out of some disgraceful scrape.

Tom passed his tongue over his lips, a peculiarly unattractive trick he had, and began again:

"Shouldn't wonder if I went down again soon. I like that place. Nice little girl that little Gloria too. Good fun. Real lively little sport. Never thought it up here, but down there she sort of lets herself go. Gave me an awful breather on the beach one day. Pretty, slim legs she's got, and good eyes. She can use them to some effect, too. Not that she really flirts with a man, you understand, but she ain't adverse to a bit of a fling, I should say——"

He shrank back instinctively from the sight of Richard's glowering eyes.

"Now, now," he said, holding up a playful hand, "don't get excited. I haven't led the little silly astray at all. I know better than to trespass on your preserves."

Richard turned abruptly on his heel and passed into the court-room, and a few minutes later Tom left the building laughing silently as if he had been seeing a good play.

Richard, after he left Tom, went into the court-room, where a tiresome trial was going on, conducted by an exceedingly nervous young barrister whose wig was askew.

Richard tried to collect his thoughts and rivet them on the case in hand. But it was an impossible task; his mind kept going off at a tangent to Rydnor and the open sea, to follow Gloria speeding like a swallow over the downs or wandering along the spume-flecked shore line. The young barrister's voice seemed to come to him vaguely as from a great distance. It was absurd to sit here listening to a puerile matter of this kind. Simeon could just as well have sent a clerk down for the information he wanted. In his impatience he forgot that it was his own offer that he stop. But his thoughts were all on Rydnor and the fact that Tom had been down to see her there; Tom had walked with her along the beach. Richard looked up angrily. That young barrister was a fool!

An hour later he came out of the court-room not much wiser than when he went in.

He went home to a solitary luncheon. The under housemaid, who was on duty during Martha's absence, looked surprised when she saw him. He generally

lunched in the City or at his club, particularly now that the ladies were away.

She admitted, however, that cook could get him up something. It would only take a few minutes.

"Just a bite," Richard said, somewhat apologetically; he didn't want much, and went upstairs till it should be ready.

There was something unutterably dreary and forlorn about the silent house. He walked into the apartment he and Irene had shared ever since their marriage fourteen years ago. It was a pleasant room with an outlook on the park; the walls hung with a soft grey satiny paper and the windows draped in delicate-hued chintzes. But to-day it seemed somehow garish and void, as if a presence had departed. It was like a room where a funeral has taken place. Its atmosphere depressed him. It seemed so at variance with the warm summer sunlight outside. Rising abruptly from his seat by the reading table, Richard went out into the hall again.

How still it was! Not a whisper, not a footstep echoed in the place.

He walked to the head of the stair. He knew that the maids were down there somewhere below, but he might as well have been on a desert island, lost in a tropical sea, for all the sign they gave.

Richard turned back and, crossing the corridor, entered the room which Gloria occupied when at home. He closed the door behind him and then looked around. With the diminished staff of servants, there was no danger that he would be disturbed. Nevertheless, it was with a feeling of something like guilt in his heart that he crossed the empty room and stood in the centre, glancing somewhat curiously about him.



He had not been in this room since Gloria came to them. Indeed he could not remember that he had ever been in it, but he supposed he must have at some time or other. It was a pretty room, not very spacious; the windows looking out on a little backwater of traffic which at one time had probably been a mews. The room was small but bore a certain air of self-sufficiency rather like its owner. As he sensed something of this, there crept into Richard's eyes a subtle tenderness.

He turned over the few books which lay in a careless heap on the table; a *Pilgrim's Progress*; a copy of Rupert Brooke's *Poems*; *A Shropshire Lad*; *Don Quixote*, and lastly a *Tacitus*.

Richard glanced at it curiously, and then crossing with it to the low window-seat, began idly turning the pages. The latter half of the book was still apparently unread, but the first pages were thumbed and bore traces of use where Gloria, childlike, had been laboriously studying them. He remembered now having recommended her to read *Tacitus* in some careless conversation, and she, poor child, had evidently been struggling with it ever since. On the page which showed the most marked evidences of toil, Richard began to read.

It was difficult, he had to admit,—hard for a girl. Poor little Gloria! Soon he forgot even Gloria. He read, and as the old familiar words passed before his eyes, the years seemed to fall away from him. He was back at school once more, with all of life an unexplored universe before him.

Through the open window came the subdued hum of London streets muffled to a cadence like the humming of a giant bumble-bee somewhere without. The warm

wind, fluttering over the roofs of the neighbouring houses, fanned his cheek. He knew that the little dusty backwater of traffic was in reality out there, just beneath the window; but it seemed to him, instead, that in the quivering heat, the cricket ground was calling to him. Only he couldn't go out and join the others because he must stay here preparing for old Dickson's class in the morning.

"*Et hic quidem Romæ, tamquam, in tanta multitudine, habitus animorum fuit. E provinciis, Hispaniæ præerat cluvius Rufus—*" he read. How the old familiar words of the tattered school book brought the memory back to him. Could it really have been so many years ago? Or were all those intervening years but a dream after all? Would Tom Carteret or Nicky Hurston rush in presently to drag him from his place for a romp in the "quad" before tea? Would old Harley walk through the halls swishing his silk gown and casting looks like Jove's lightnings from side to side to strike terror to the hearts of "Lower Third"? Could it be only fancy now, that made him hear, above the subdued roar of the London streets, the thin piping voice of Turner shouting directions to the School Eleven down below? But, alas! dreams are fragile things. They cannot last and a word or a touch dispels them.

Richard knew when the dream was gone. But he went on reading,—hoping, perhaps, again to catch the fragrance of that lost moment of oblivion. His eye wandered down the page, skipping here and there a word of which the meaning escaped him. He turned the page and saw a little caricature of himself drawn in one corner of the margin. The reading-lamp just indicated behind his head showed that she must have

drawn it when they were all together in the library one evening. It was just such a silly little drawing as he had done hundreds of times in his own school books, of old, dear, now forgotten school fellows. It touched him with a sort of pang to think of Gloria doing that. What a child she was, after all!

His thoughts turned abruptly to Rydnor and Tom's having been down there. Tom had been down there; Tom had been with her. And here was he sticking up here in musty London. He put the book down on the window-seat.

He looked at his life, and in many ways it seemed a barren waste. True he had need to be grateful for many things. He had succeeded along those lines by which men measure success. And yet,—and yet—"What profiteth it a man," he murmured to himself. He had perhaps enough of what most men require in life to make them happy. Why then was he not content? Yet there was something else he wanted, something intangible, a fugitive joy he had missed, something for which Gloria stood as a symbol. It was this subtle elusive quality in her, rather than the girl herself, that allured him. It was the youth in her calling out to him. Life was slipping by him now in rapid strides. Age reared its hideous head just around the corner. Was there something he must seize first and make his own before Time's insolent advance rendered it hopeless?

There were the fifties coming! Richard saw the future with fatal clearness; youth fading in the slow procession of monotonous years; a little standing still, as it were, and then the rapid decline down the long slope of age. Now, if ever, was the time when he must take from Life all that remained for her to offer!

And here was Gloria, young, eager, generous, calling to him.

Richard put the book back on the table and went down to luncheon.

Later he stood in the drawing-room. He was thinking of the sea. It was cool there— Why should the thought of Gloria persist so? He seemed to see her against a background of white sand and grey dunes. Tom had been down— Why this feeling that he ought to stay away?

He watched the flickering of leaf-shadows on the balcony floor outside the open window. But instead he saw the dancing waves sparkling in the sunlight, and Gloria standing by the edge of the water.

And suddenly he knew! *He wanted to see her!*

"I'll go down this afternoon," he said to himself.

## CHAPTER XII

### PRELUDE

GLORIA had driven in to Rydnor to order some provisions, going thither in the little donkey-carriage which was the property of their landlord.

As a rule she rather enjoyed the small weekly expedition. It offered a bit of variety to the usual round of life at the farm. And to-day especially she was glad of an escape. She was restless and out of sorts; and the sight of Irene, so serene and placid, jarred somehow on her nerves. The drive, all alone, she felt might be a relief. However, the day was warm and Nero, the donkey, stubbornly determined not to move faster than a walk. Gloria, letting the reins lie loosely in her hands, tried in vain to pull her mind into its ordinary paths. Her thoughts were vague and complex. It seemed ridiculous to have to concentrate on how many jars of potted meat, how many tins of soup were needed, and all the rest of the household economy. There was in her heart a dumb yearning, an indefinable desire of which she was but half conscious. Beneath her exterior calm there trembled a strange excitement.

It was very hot in the town. She completed her purchases within the half hour, methodically going over the list which Irene had made out in her careful, neat handwriting. Nothing was missing; all the packages neatly piled up in the rear of the cart. But

it was really too hot a day for shopping. She was glad to start back.

At the last moment before she left the farm, Irene had asked her to bring home a new bathing-cap. It slipped her memory until she was quite a mile and a half on her homeward journey. Then she suddenly remembered. It hadn't been put on the list because Irene had just run out of the house at the last moment and called to her to bring it, saying that she had to have it. Her old cap was in ribbons.

Gloria stopped the donkey-cart by the side of the road and pondered.

The sun lay hot and quivering above the grasses, turning the white ribbon of road into a streak of glaring light. The bushes by the side of the road drooped under their thick coating of dust. Content to remain idle, the donkey cocked his ears and then began a gentle shaking, his usual preliminary to a nap.

And still Gloria sat there wrapped in thought.

It was a nuisance to go back. The thought of the ocean tempted her forward. If she went right on now, there would be time for a swim before tea. It seemed as if she had never wanted a plunge so much in her life. And yet Irene had asked her specially to get the cap for her. It was stupid to have forgotten it. Irene could wait until next marketing day, of course. She didn't bathe every day. And yet it was really her, Gloria's, fault. She ought not to have forgotten. And somehow just now particularly she hated not to oblige Irene.

Well,—nothing for it but to go back to town after the cap. She turned the donkey, plainly showing his displeasure, once more in the direction of Rydnor. Nero, disgusted at such a pusillanimous exhibition of

indecision, refused to do anything better than a walk. It was something past four when Gloria finally pulled up before Fraser's tiny shop on the sunny side of the High Street. It was a funny little out-of-the-way shop which Irene liked to patronise because of old Mr. Fraser's painstaking and honest service.

She tied Nero carefully to the horse-post outside, although there was not the slightest probability of his running away, the utmost efforts being necessary to persuade him into motion at all, and turned to enter the shop.

She paused for a moment outside the door with her fingers already grasping the knob, to look down the long sun-flecked street. A man was sauntering down the opposite side. Something familiar in his gait made Gloria pause again before turning the knob. The man was crossing the road. He stepped suddenly into the full blaze of sunlight. It was Richard!

They entered the shop side by side. Old Mr. Fraser, ambling out from the rear room which served the family as both parlour and dining-room, greeted them with solemn courtesy.

It was a long time, he said to Gloria, since she had been there, in the store. He hoped Mrs. Baldwin was quite well. Not being aware of Richard's identity, but taking it for granted that he was Gloria's "young man" he addressed all his conversation to her, leaving Richard to devour her with his eyes in comfortable silence. There was, as he expressed it afterward to Mrs. Fraser in the sanctity of the back parlour, "some thing queer about them two." So much for Mr. Fraser as a psychologist!

As for Gloria, she stood at the old-fashioned high counter as if in a dream. Through the window where

the grime of ages had imperceptibly settled, she could see the little street, narrow and crooked, its pavement sending up waves of heat that quivered in the air. Nero, fast asleep, stood drooping in the shafts of the cart. No one save themselves appeared to be abroad. It was like the domain of the Sleeping Beauty.

She seemed in a dream and yet acutely conscious of her surroundings; of the smell of frying fish coming through the open parlour door; of the flies that buzzed noisily in the corner by the window, and of old Mr. Fraser's querulous voice breaking through the dream with banal reassurance:

"I'm sure you'll find this one very satisfactory, ma'am."

The pungent odour of the rubber bathing-caps rose to her nostrils, mingled with the greasy fish that Mrs. Fraser was frying so diligently back there. And with it all, inextricably a part of the dream, a strange sense of familiarity with the scene, a sort of consciousness of having been through it all before. And the look, the half-startled expression in Richard's eyes!

They went out together into the raw sunlight, blinking a little after the close interior of the shop. After his first greeting Richard had not uttered a word. Gloria untied the donkey, who appeared properly annoyed at being awakened, and she and Richard climbed into the little cart side by side.

Through Richard's brain there was running a kind of monotone. "Mustn't make a fool of myself," he muttered to himself as he climbed into the cart beside her. "Mustn't make a fool of myself!" was his mental injunction as they started on the homeward journey. And all the way home as the pleasant sun-col-



oured miles were traversed and the sea advanced nearer and nearer, he kept repeating: "Mustn't make a fool of myself!"

For the unexpected sight of Gloria standing in the narrow sun-lit street before the door of the little old shop had thrilled him with a sudden poignant emotion, intense and bewildering, like a vision of heaven abruptly opening to mortal view.

In consequence he felt that he must keep himself in hand. For the first time in his relations with Gloria he scented danger, a keen and wonderful danger that set the blood tingling in his veins, and his pulses beating with an almost painful ebb and flow.

They talked but little, as the donkey-cart trundled along the road. Gloria whipped up the little beast, which went readily enough now that they were turned towards home. She wanted to delay their return, or, if it were possible, to lengthen that drive along the curving white road, where the sharp scent of broom and sea grass was blown across their senses and the sea came nearer and nearer at every turn. But for the life of her she could not resist urging Nero on. As on the day, last spring in the wood, she seemed abnormally conscious of Richard's presence beside her, of his closeness to her, an accentuated realisation of his entity.

They came sharply to the crest of a high hill and there below them was the sea. From their height it seemed to stretch upward before them like a wall. An undulating expanse of misty grey with the gulls flying over it, no wonder that for a moment Richard mistook it for a wide valley which the ripples on the surface divided into fields and meadows. The whole mass was swimming in the sunlight. Then far out a white

sail flashed, flecking the grey-blue, and instantly it was ocean again, its thunders already audible.

"Hear it," said Gloria, "isn't it wonderful!"

Richard looked down at her. She seemed somehow transfigured.

"You love it?"

"It's life to me," she replied, "I think some of my ancestors must have been Vikings and 'gone down to the sea in ships.' Always I feel it at this first sight of it that you get from the hill."

After that they were silent again. The donkey, scenting home, trotted gaily down the long incline unguided by Gloria's hands which lay slack on the reins. The sunlight danced above the grasses. Thistledown and pollen floated around them whenever the fat donkey brushed against the bushes at the side of the road. The cool sea-breeze fanned their faces. After the heat of London it was to Richard like a breath wafted from the Islands of the Blest. And the little rutted shore road was running straight through the Elysian Fields. Richard was just wishing that the road might wind on forever, when they drove up before the cottage door and it was all over.

It was a great surprise to Irene that Richard should have come down. He had so often assured her in his letters that he could not possibly get away from the office. But she made him very welcome. In spite of an indefinable feeling that he would better not have come, she was in a tremulous flutter of excitement. It was absurd of course! Her emotions might have been natural in a bride of a few weeks, but for a woman fourteen years married! Until now that he was here, she had not realised how much she had wanted him. It was indeed good to have him sitting opposite her

once more. She was afraid, however, that he might find it a little dull down here.

She said something of this when, after a hearty country supper, they were all together in the sitting-room where Elijah and the raven presided.

"We'll have to make him walk," said Gloria.

Irene agreed somewhat doubtfully. It would be nice for Richard to have some long walks. She was quite sure he needed good out-of-door exercise, but on the other hand she was not fond of walking herself and she would have preferred to prescribe for him amusements in which she could share. There had been in her mind, although she scarcely dared admit it to herself, dreading to appear ridiculous even subconsciously, dreams of Richard sitting beside her on the quiet sun-drenched beach, through the long golden afternoons. Just she and Richard alone. So she was almost startled when Gloria said suddenly:

"We'll take him to-morrow to look at the tower."

Richard smiled at the girl's sparkling eyes. There was an eager flush on her cheeks.

"Tower? What tower?" he asked.

Gloria leaned forward, impatiently explaining: "It's a part of a very old building, a monastery or something. But the rest's all gone. Only the tower remaining. No one seems to be quite sure when it was built or what its history is, but it's a frightfully interesting old ruin. And only a few miles up the coast. I've passed it once or twice on my walks, but I've never gone inside. We've always talked about going, haven't we, Irene? But we've never got there yet. I wish we could."

"We shall go to-morrow," said Richard promptly. "You'd enjoy it, wouldn't you, Irene?"

With something of an effort Irene curved her lips into a smile.

"Oh, of course, Richard. It will be great fun. By all means let's do it."

But she had to disguise a certain tugging at her heart. And suddenly she shivered involuntarily.

"You're not cold?" said Richard. Irene shook her head.

"Someone walked over her grave," remarked Gloria in a matter-of-fact voice.

## CHAPTER XIII

### WHITE SHADOWS

ON the following afternoon, obedient to Gloria's desires, they started in quest of the tower.

The man at the farmhouse had given it as his opinion that the walk was "something better nor three miles." It seemed a very long way to Irene.

After they turned off from the main road, the path led along the edge of the cliffs, and it was there that Irene began to lag behind. Somehow she could not feel as energetic as the others, and besides there was not room on the path for three abreast. She felt heavy and old. Why could she not feel that joy of life that Gloria seemed to feel? She could not remember it even in the days when she was very young, as young as Gloria. She tried to recollect certain stuffy seaside visits with her parents. She remembered them vaguely but she could not recall dashing over the downs like this. There had been a pony carriage in which she used to ride with her father. She couldn't call to mind that there was ever very much walking.

The others were getting quite a distance ahead. Irene began to feel very tired. It was terribly hot, too. The sun was high, and the sunshade she carried was getting heavy. It cramped her hand, the way she was obliged to hold it in order to keep the sun out of her eyes.

Why must they tear along like that, never looking

at anything at all? Irene paused a moment to gaze out over the high cliff at the blue rolling ocean with its crisp white line of surf like the flutings on a lady's dress. Her heart was heavy and she felt physically tired. The beauty of the scene made no impression on her mind.

She looked forward again to where Richard and Gloria were breasting the main rise. They had neither of them noticed that Irene had paused. Completely absorbed in one another, they remained oblivious of the fact that she was not following.

With a little sigh, Irene looked down at the narrow strip of beach stretching, a white shelter, under the cliffs. It was cool down there. A winding downward path showed nearby. If she were to climb down there and wait for them to return, would they notice her absence then?

Something in her heart told her they would not, but she felt a grim pleasure in putting it to the test. Closing her sunshade abruptly, she cautiously made her way over the shelving banks to the path below. The footing here was precarious, and it was with some difficulty that she climbed slowly down. A gentle slope led her thence to the beach. In a moment she was out of sight of the path above.

Seated on the sand in the cool shadow, she waited to hear any questioning hails from above. She listened in vain. No sound came to her save the low sucking murmur of the tide on the beach and the occasional pipe of a seabird. Once she thought she heard Richard's voice, but the sound did not come again.

Irene watched the antics of a sandpiper among a bit of seaweed. She felt tired, more tired than she had at first imagined. As the sun slipped down behind the

rocks, a feeling of suffocation began to overpower her. She rose and walked up and down the narrow strip of beach, but she could not throw off her claustrophobia. She felt hurt and sore. Of what use was life if it left one like this?

Finding no answer in the golden-coloured sea, nor in the grey rocks which reflected its glory, Irene turned once more in the direction of the sunset and walked slowly home.

It was after supper that she mastered her voice sufficiently to ask after their pilgrimage. Had Richard and Gloria found the tower interesting? Did it repay the long walk thither?

Gloria answered carelessly, her hand searching among the chocolates Richard had brought down, for the kind she liked best:—

“Oh, we didn’t get all the way there. It was hot and we sat down on the high cliff to watch the sea. We’re going to try another day.”

Richard looked up suddenly, a new revelation in his eyes.

“Oh, I say, where were you? Why didn’t you come along?”

Irene’s eyes fell before his intense gaze.

“I felt tired and turned back after a little.” And she turned away her head. She did not want Richard to see how the simple conversation stirred her.

But they had not reached the tower. She felt a strange relief at that. It was a curious idea; but she was glad, distinctly glad they had not reached the tower.

## CHAPTER XIV

### AUNT LETTY SCHEMES

EVER since Isabel had told them of that visit to Gloria, and what her dear father Simeon had reported to her, Aunt Letty had been worried. In the course of a long and not too happy life, Aunt Letty had found a good many things to worry and upset her. Only a certain hopeful simplicity in her nature had kept her heart sweet and unspoiled by adversity. Yet nothing, not even the late Bancroft's peccadilloes and shortcomings, had affected her as had this news about Richard and Irene. It was, she felt, the most painful thing that could have happened. Those two had always seemed in her mind so secure, so perfectly matched, so free from all jarring accompaniments of conjugal life. She had had her doubts, now, about Flora and Tom. That could not be denied. But Richard and Irene! It seemed too terrible to contemplate, that the simple advent of that unfortunate little granddaughter of poor dear Nathan's should prove so disastrous to their happiness.

Her mind, rapid to foresee misfortune, anticipated much unpleasantness. That even the faintest suspicion of scandal should touch that family in which she, perhaps more than any other individual, possessed an infinite pride, was to her a grief beyond words. That affair of Mrs. John's had happened so long ago, and been so discreetly managed, that she counted it out altogether; and in her innocence Aunt Letty fancied



that she had always been able successfully to hide poor weak Bancroft's failings. The only really palpable scandal, then, had been that of poor Nathan's little daughter Rosemary. It struck Aunt Letty as a kind of calamitous coincidence that when disruption once more threatened the house of Baldwin, it should again come from this source.

Again and again Aunt Letty went over the whole affair. At present, of course, the gossip was strictly confined to the family, but were matters carried to extremes, news of the unfortunate situation would undoubtedly leak out; it would, in short, become public property. And then alas! for the prestige of all Baldwins.

On the other hand, of course, the question admitted of a doubt. There might really be nothing in it at all. It would be too terrible if Richard were really to forget himself like that. Perhaps Isabel had been mistaken. Aunt Letty hoped, but she was by no means convinced.

As for the girl, Gloria, Aunt Letty was decidedly unsympathetic. "Deep," Isabel had said she was. Aunt Letty did not think, as Hildegarde and Mrs. John obviously did, that Gloria was a designing minx, bent on breaking up Irene's home, or in more fanciful language, anxious to bite the hand which had so kindly fed her, but she did think, somewhat severely, that the girl ought to know better!

Then again, of course, it was wrong to condemn them before learning the exact truth. But there was the difficulty! How were they to know the exact truth?

Letty was in great doubt and uncertainty of mind about it all. She endeavoured very judiciously to weigh the pros and cons. It was a fiction with her that she possessed great commonsense. She went over the scant

evidence which she had acquired, calling this famous commonsense into play, and valiantly hoping thereby to achieve some result. But in the end there remained before her mind's eye only the fact that Simeon had been impressed with their guilty manner. And she knew Simeon to be a most acute observer, a man not easily imposed upon or carried away by sentiment. And if Simeon was thus impressed, something *must* be wrong.

Something that is wrong should be righted. That was one of Aunt Letty's pet principles. In such a situation something ought to be done. This idea stood out in Aunt Letty's mind before all others. The question only remained what. For the old lady's nature was one of those which suffer far more from a dread of not doing what is necessary,—of leaving something undone which ought to be done, than through any fear of doing what she shouldn't.

And she had quite convinced herself that something must be done. On the other hand, her shy sensitive soul had an instinctive horror of anything that appeared like meddling. Only a sense of grave danger could induce her to set aside her natural delicacy in such a case. Goaded on by a desire to see things finally settled, and by a real desire to be of service, her mind at this time was in a pitiful state of vacillation.

Added to the other difficulties, the problem of a method of procedure troubled her. It was very awkward! She would have liked to go to Richard himself. She had always been fond of the boy, and she liked straightforward methods.

Yet this course seemed hardly the proper one. Such an action is not at all easy, particularly if one belongs, as Aunt Letty decidedly did, to the old school; inclin-

ing, as it does, towards a delicate symbolism, rather than plain speaking. Like others of her age and type, Aunt Letty enjoyed mentally giving a spade the appellation of a spade, but in company she was very prone to call it an agricultural implement. She had most decided views on abstract ethics, but it was not in her to go to Richard and say to him:

"Now are you, or are you not, living in sin with this young relative of ours who has been put under your care?"

It wasn't in her at all. Aunt Letty felt that she would have died first. Though she had spanked him and fed him sweetmeats, and dangled him on her knee in times past, or perhaps just because of these things, she could not do it. The very idea of such a thing was sufficient to send her shuddering into her bedroom to bolt the door. For Richard was a man and she a woman, and therefore all delicacy. Even with the late Bancroft, she had had her reticences.

It was hard, therefore, that upon her of all the family should fall the task of setting right the difficulties in her nephew's household. Yet so it was, or so, at least, Aunt Letty conceived it to be.

Under ordinary circumstances, in that great family life of which, throughout the length and breadth of the land, the Baldwins were but a type and an example, when outside influences threatened any deleterious impingement upon their rights or comfort, as *vide* Tom's marriage with the harmless but undesirable Flora (since assimilated into the family, however) or Joe Bixby's impending bankruptcy in the second year of Susan's marriage, an appeal would be sent out, a sort of calling of the Clan together, that in united ranks they might make common cause against the

enemy. But these had been matters of very general interest. This affair of Richard's was different. It was not, Aunt Letty felt, a subject which could be discussed in family conclave. No! Someone, or perhaps two, of Richard's nearest and dearest must take it into their hands and act thereon without reference to the others.

It was almost in the light of an inspiration that the idea came to her of enlisting Tom in this service with her. It was true that Tom also was of that forbidden sex for the discussing of matters of doubtful propriety, but an old lady may, under pressing circumstances, speak to one young man about another if for the good of the one concerned. There is nothing personal in that. Perhaps it was a bit Jesuitical, but dear Tom, she felt, being a man of the world might even have more influence than herself, woman that she was, however fine her intentions. Ignorant of Tom's own rather wild career about the Music Halls and at the Amion Club, where he spent a great part of his time, she felt sure that he must have some influence at least with dear Richard. They had been at school together, she recalled, and while not at all intimate of late years, she was sure the old bonds of comradeship as well as cousinship still held them together.

So on a bright afternoon in mid-August, Aunt Letty went to Tom. And Tom, with his tongue in his cheek, gravely promised his help. He had thought, he said, of running down to Rydnor again anyway. Now that Aunt Letty had spoken of it, he'd make it a point to do so. She might safely leave it all to him.

The old lady returned to Gloucester Terrace quite satisfied and much comforted in her mind.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE TOWER

RICHARD and Gloria walked along the curving line of the cliffs, following the narrow path that dipped and turned with changeful eccentricity.

It was blue summer all about them. In the air was the scent of gorse and bracken and the salt sweet tang of the sea. The heat quivered over the long line of the downs and sparkled in a million facets of light on the rippling waves.

As they walked, clouds of butterflies sprang up at their approach, and the pollen rose in waves about them. Beyond, a far headland jutting out into the sea, reflected the light of the sun with a dazzling whiteness.

A gull flapped mewing over their heads and Gloria watched the long curve of its flight with faintly wistful eyes. The arc of the sky, a deep sapphire blue, dipped low to the horizon where, close together, a fleet of milk-white cloud galleons raced.

The restless sea, as if stirred by some obscure emotion, murmured below them like the unquiet humming of bees in deep pastures.

Richard looked about him. Eternal summer was in the scene, in the gentle breeze, in the sunlight over the long rolling downs. And in Gloria walking ahead of him with her careless boy's walk that had in it just the suspicion of a swagger, was the spirit of eternal youth. With a sensation almost like pain he turned his eyes away towards the sea, dazzling in the keen white light,

trying to fix them on that far white headland. But his gaze returned in spite of him to that slim little figure in front of him.

The sun touched her hair (she had taken off her hat and was swinging it by her side as she walked), turning the dusky masses into streaks of copper, flushing her cheeks and filling her whole body with a warm vitality that pervaded his senses like escaping perfume. She seemed wondrously alive, warmed by the sun and fanned by the breeze till their very essence had entered into her, making of her an integral part of the summer and the daylight, as much a part of them as the motes floating in the sunbeam. As she stood before him, or slipped along ahead of him with her rapid springing tread, she was the epitome of youth, the very Joy o' Life.

Youth! Youth! cried a voice within him, as Richard followed her light footsteps, and below it,—deeper, hidden,—spoke another voice which Richard in spite of himself was beginning to hear: "Love! Love!" it whispered.

And the thought of her as a spirit of eternal youth stayed with him as they followed the narrow winding path down the cliff and up once more; hovered close as they stood together, side by side on the gorse-covered rise which overlooked the far distant outlines of ragged shores bathing their feet in foam; kept with them along the strip of sand into which the path descended, and mounted with them to the purple levels of the downs, where presently before them rose the tower, its stonework gleaming white through the masses of ivy clinging to its circular walls.

Not unlike a lighthouse in appearance, it rose abruptly from the plain of the downs, making the sur-

rounding country seem somehow flatter. On one side the outer walls had partly crumbled, but had not yet given way. Already the ivy was busy climbing over the piles of broken stone in an endeavour to obliterate the disintegrating touch of Time's finger. But for the most part it was a substantial piece of masonry, worn but undefeated, raising its head in proud defiance of the ages, its purpose forgotten, but its dignity remaining.

Richard and Gloria looked at the great ruined mass curiously.

"It might be fun to explore. Does anyone ever go in?" Richard asked.

A low nail-studded door still guarded the only visible entrance. Richard pushed it with his arm and it swung partly open.

"It isn't locked," he said. "Shall we go in?"

The darkness inside almost startled them. After the hot glare of the sun on the sea, the soft coolness of the interior smote them like a gentle blow. The door swung to behind them and they looked about.

As their eyes became accustomed to the dim light, they saw that there was nothing grim or forbidding about the place. High up in the walls the narrow windows, destitute of any covering, let in the slanting rays of the sun through leafy screens of the ivy which was fast covering the openings, and even climbing down the inside walls, like the tentacles of a huge octopus.

But the soft coolness was refreshing. A great gap in the roof over the ruined staircase, let in light on the upper part of the building, leaving the floor in shadow. The cool peace of the place was like a benediction. The deep shadow, beneficent and calm, engulfed them and threw its protecting mantle over them.

In the intense silence Gloria felt her heart beating violently. Perhaps Richard felt it too, for he looked away suddenly, glancing upward where a break in the wall let through a gleam of sunlight on the fragment of a winding stone staircase that once climbed the full height of the tower.

It ran now only a part of the way up, disappearing from their sight where a portion of the building had been roofed over to make two stories. Grass was growing in the cracks along the edge of the steps, and where one of the ancient treads had crumbled into dust, a tall lily clung precariously to the lichened wall. Some of the steps had tumbled down on the others although the general formation of a staircase remained.

"I'm going to see what's up above there," said Richard, and suiting the action to the word, he mounted the cracked and worn stairs.

Gloria remained standing down below alone in the quiet shadows. It was very still and somehow very strange here, just a little eerie. Why had her heart beat like that a moment before? When Richard left her side it had grown normal again.

A slight draught caused a yellow leaf, relic of last year's dying, to flutter across the floor at her feet, and Gloria regarded it pensively.

But Richard was calling from above. His voice seemed to come from very far away.

"There's a sort of room up here. It's rather jolly."

Gloria waited, her eyes searching the shadows on the ivy-flecked wall.

And again: "It has a casement window looking out over the sea, and an old stone window seat."

Still Gloria stood there.



"It's a ripping place!"

At length Richard appeared at the top of the flight of steps. His eyes held a strange excited look and his voice trembled ever so slightly. He ran down a few steps.

"Come up!" he cried, "it's not difficult."

He stretched out his hand to her.

"Come up," he said, "I'll help you. Come up!"

## CHAPTER XVI

### BETRAYED

TOM's train was half an hour late. It therefore happened that the fly which was conveying him from Rydnor to the farm rounded the turn near the tower at exactly ten minutes past five, and therefore came upon Richard and Gloria just as they emerged from the door.

So unexpected was the encounter, so suddenly had the fly drawn up, that for an instant Tom was actually abashed.

For there was no mistaking the look on their faces. Life had held many revelations for Tom Baldwin, and such illusions as he had once possessed had long since forsaken him; but there is something so arresting in the face of a woman just loved for the first time, that even the obtuse Tom could not be insensible to its spell. And in Richard's eyes also there shone a new meaning. It was not that they did or said anything. They only stood there as if in mute corroboration of Mrs. Bancroft's suspicions. Yet a kind of glory shone round them, informing their faces with a mystical glow.

For a moment, but for a moment only, something of its vague wonderment and terrible beauty penetrated the steely exterior of the man in the fly. The next instant he remembered that love such as this was illicit. These people standing before him, the man at least already married, were guilty of that forbidden sin against society, and therefore love between them

was a thing of mockery, something to call forth humour, to be ridiculed and jeered at.

So, quickly recovering himself, he leaned well out of the carriage. Raising his hat in a mocking exaggeration of courtesy, he shouted back a half ribald warning. The words were lost in the clatter of the horse's hoofs and the creaking of the ancient vehicle, but his meaning was more than clear.

"Curse him!" muttered Richard beneath his breath, as he gazed after the cloud of dust in which the fly seemed to have been swallowed up. "Curse him!"

But the dust having settled, they resumed their walk. He looked at Gloria. She was walking with her head up, just as she always did. There was no sign that she had understood Tom's imputation, no trace of guilt on her features or about her carriage. For an instant Richard wondered if she had failed to recognise the occupant of the fly, or if she were actually unconscious that they had been overseen. Or was she simply careless of all observation?

A mile or so farther on, Tom overtook Irene. She was walking in listless fashion along the road, a book in one hand and a rug slung over her arm. There was something in her unconscious attitude which tickled Tom's sense of humour. After what he had just seen a little way down the road, this was the fitting climax.

With a loud "Halloa!" Tom caused his vehicle to draw up alongside the road. Irene, who had not at first recognised him, drew back, thinking the man was drunk and trying to run her down.

But Tom leaned far out of the carriage, smiling his Quilpish smile.

"Just goin' to your place," he called. "Ran down

for another jolly little week-end. I'll take you home. Get in."

Irene demurred. It was but a step to the house and she needed the exercise. She would be there presently if he were to drive on.

But Tom was insistent. Why should a pretty woman tire herself all out walking? To say nothing of spoiling her slippers. And such pretty slippers, too! It was all nonsense for her to think she needed exercise, with a figure like hers. Fat women might have to walk, but not she. Come now, climb in.

Disliking him intensely, Irene mounted beside him.

"Lovely day for walking," Tom remarked after they had gone a few yards. "Seen several people out to-day." And he stole a look at her, trying to see under her broad-brimmed hat.

Irene glanced at him out of the corners of her eyes. She could never feel quite at ease in this man's company and she distrusted him profoundly. Also the peculiar habit he had of biting his nails annoyed her excessively and she hated the smearing quality of his voice when he spoke.

Tom, however, did not talk much. A malicious smile, as if at something hidden and unseemly, played across his features. He was thinking, "So that's why Richard stays down here so long!"

Irene ventured some trite remark, not because she wanted to talk but just so that he should not think she was snubbing him, and Tom answered her absently. His thoughts were running something like this:

"What a lark it would be to tell her. Wonder just how she'd take it? But of course a man mustn't give another man away! Wouldn't do at all; doesn't know

when he may need a bit of cover himself. It'd all be all up if men went about peachin' on one another."

He recalled certain obscure adventures of his own in which he had not been quite as successful in providing "cover" for himself as he could have wished, so that Flora had guessed more than was good for him. But then Flora was so devilish smart. And so jealous! She'd be having a fit, now, probably, if she knew he was here alone with Irene. Not that he was anything like as bad as Richard. In his own house, you might almost say . . .

And to catch the beggar out in a thing like this! Hoighty-toighty! Leading that little innocent astray! Not but that he'd warrant she was asking for it!

Wouldn't do of course to peach on 'em. All the same, if you knew, my dear—Whew!—And he glanced admiringly at the woman beside him. Irene tried to meet his sardonic grin with a smile of her own, which so called forth Tom's good humour that he laughed outright, a thing he was seldom known to do.

Irene went upstairs to dress, leaving him in the sitting-room at the cottage, still chuckling.

Tom's good humour did not evaporate with the evening. With dinner and the return of the guilty pair, his hilarity increased. Not content with a notable display of high spirits, his Satanic humour demanded that the occasion be celebrated. By the time the dessert was reached, he had decided what form it should take. He made them all a proposal:

"What d'you say if we get a car and motor down to Brighton. Just for a little dancing, you know, and a bit of supper. I'll bet Gloria, here, 's never been to Brighton." Gloria shook her head. "No? I thought

not. Well, you'll enjoy it. Gayest little spot in England."

Richard put in a deterrent voice.

"It's too far. Silly to try to make a trip like that after dark."

But it wasn't really dark out yet, and Tom insisted.

"I tell you it's the thing to do. These girls want cheering up. Dreadful dull it must get down here without any parties. I'll stand treat. We'll open a bottle or two to liven us up. Don't shake your head like that, Richard. Don't be a crab. I tell you it's my party. And the little girl here wants to go. You'll like Brighton," he added, turning to Gloria. "Ripping place."

In the end he won his point. A car was sent for from Rydnor and in a few minutes they were off.

With the exception of Tom, a less enthusiastic company of people could not have been found in the length and breadth of England. Richard was in a sullen mood. He felt that the man was a beast, and that over Gloria hovered some danger from "this fellow" that he must guard her from. He was watchful and suspicious.

Gloria herself was strangely silent, lost in her own dreams and recollections. She had not quarrelled with the idea of the party because it was all one to her where they went, so long as she and Richard were together. She would have preferred to do without Tom's slightly objectionable presence, but she could pay little or no attention to him; and it made someone to talk to Irene, and to cover any awkward silences.

Irene, in her turn, did somewhat more to hold the party together. But she was vaguely troubled and distressed by this second visit of Tom's, and by the unus-

ual boisterous turn which his humour seemed to have taken. The looks which he cast on Richard, full of hidden merriment, and the black ones Richard returned him, almost frightened her. Nor did her anxiety decrease during the evening.

Seated on the terrace, outside the "Gothic Hotel," Tom ordered bottle after bottle of wine, which he despatched with a rapidity startling to one unaccustomed to his habits. They had tried a couple of turns to the music inside, Gloria and Richard dancing together and Irene and Tom, but all apparently preferred sitting out here in the cool to the hot overcrowded rooms. It had been a relief to Irene when they chose this alternative, for she felt a peculiar distaste for dancing with Tom; but as she watched him, tipping back on the rear legs of his chair, his face growing redder and redder with every glass, she began to think that it would have been better had they stayed inside.

Irene watched him gravely. He was in a rare good humour as yet, and made subtle unintelligible jokes, unintelligible to her, at least, but which in some manner Richard appeared to comprehend. Her husband's brow grew darker and darker. When he spoke, which was seldom and in monosyllables, his manner was brusque, almost truculent.

Gloria, too, took no trouble to conceal her aversion from the man. Irene, who could not dissociate herself from a certain fitness of things, endeavoured to invent conversation. She was not a great talker by nature, so that the effort was doubly hard for her, but she felt that the awkwardness must be covered. Her attempted sprightliness, however, was at length not

struggle against Gloria's silence or Richard's ill-humour, Tom's efforts died down.

Tom, too, after the third bottle, began to feel the oppression. He became less talkative and drank more freely. After a long pause, during which they had all stared in the direction of the sea without any apparent object, Tom spoke once more, and so changed with his utterance, so thick and confused, that his three listeners started. It was due to the fourth bottle which he had ordered in an effort to lighten the lowering atmosphere of the party.

His last efforts being greeted with silence on the part of the others, Tom rallied his forces. Leaning heavily towards Gloria, who sat at his right, pushed over as far as her chair would allow towards Richard, Tom laid his hand on her arm.

"Take a little drink with me, dearie!"

The familiar, almost proprietary gesture was evident to them all before Gloria, red with mortification, shook his hand from her arm.

At the look on Richard's face, Irene trembled lest a scene occur. She overheard Gloria say in an undertone to him: "Can't we get away from him?"

For a fleeting instant Richard glanced at Irene and shook his head. He was loth to leave her alone with Tom evidently. Irene appreciated his thoughtfulness, but she hated having Gloria exposed to this indecency. Perhaps if she were alone she might be able to manage him. She was not the sort of person men took liberties with, and she had no personal fear of the man. In her pale ivory face with its placid brow and large eyes there was a dignity which enveloped and her. All that she dreaded was a scene. So



she signed to Richard to take Gloria away for a little while.

With a muttered remark about showing her the terrace, Richard conducted Gloria the length of the verandah. It was with a little sigh of happiness that in the darkness of the farther end she nestled against him.

Meanwhile, when the length of the terrace was between them and the two others, Tom was beginning to talk again.

"What's the matter with Richard, lately, eh? Seems to have a chip on his shoulder to-night, what you think? Don't know why he should, I'm sure. Damned lucky man he is, I think." He winked admiringly at Irene. The wine was circulating through his veins, giving an even more rufous hue to his heavy cheeks. "But that's Richard all over. Cocky young blighter, he always was. We were at school together, y'know. Awfully stuck-up he was even then. And its just the same now. Stuck-up."

He pondered for a moment, his heavy brow wrinkled in thought.

"No, sir," he began again after an interval. "That's something he could never get over, being stuck-up. Now, you're different. You're not stuck-up. You're human. You'd make allowances for a man. There's Flora, now, she never makes allowances either. Do you suppose she cares a pin about me after all I've done for her?" He assumed a confidential air. "I'll tell you this 'cause we're cousins in a way, you might say. Flora don't really care a thing about me. She don't understand me; that's where the trouble lies. Now you'd understand a man, you would."

She was very quiet sitting there in the dim light from

the windows. Tom could not quite see her face, but she appeared to be listening though she made no assent. His befuddled brain was at the stage when it demanded sympathy. Breathing deeply, he leaned ponderously across the table. He attempted to take her hand in his, but she slipped it off the table just before he reached it. Tom's own was left sprawling there, empty, but he did not notice.

"But we're not friends now, are we? Not really *friends*, I mean."

Again he sought to take the hand she had raised to her breast, and again she eluded him.

"No, we're not friends, now why is it? I've always liked you. We could do lots of little things together. What's the matter? I ain't askin' too much, am I? It isn't as if Flora understood me. Now most women would think I was a pretty good fella."

He had hitched his chair close to hers while he talked. And now his arm, which he had placed along the back of her chair, slid farther over along the rail, so that his shoulder was pressing hers. Irene shrank away as far as possible, but the wall of the hotel was here and prevented any real escape. Feeling her move away from him, Tom pursued the advantage he had won, and realizing that the wall held her on the other side, leaned heavily against her. With a sudden uncontrollable aversion, Irene shook him off and rose to her feet.

A little way off, with her elbows on the terrace rail and her chin cupped in her hands, Irene waited, staring out into the darkness in the direction of the sea.

Tom had watched her go with a sulky frown. He drove his hands into his pockets, and stretching out

his legs to their full extent, sat there, sunk down on his spine in moody silence.

Damned cantankerous pair, both of them, he thought. All the world treated him ill. There was Flora, for instance, she was forever nagging at him. God knows he didn't need to marry her, but he had, and what was his reward? She nagged him, that's what she did! Morning and night, just nagged him.

And this woman, here, Richard's wife. What was the matter with her, now? He'd only meant to be kind to her while her husband was off gallivanting with that little she-devil. And here she was walking away just when the conversation promised to bear fruit. Damned shame, that's what it was!

He looked at Irene standing motionless by the balustrade, her white-clad form just visible in the dim light. He licked his lips, and the ghost of a snarling smile crept over his features. "I'll make her take notice of me," he muttered.

He was silent for some moments, turning over in his mind various forms of approach to his subject. He didn't want to startle her too much, and yet he knew that he must arrest her attention at once.

"Funny thing how thick Richard and the little girl are, these days."

Irene turned sharply as his words penetrated her consciousness. She turned back from the balustrade and walked slowly to the table. But this time she sat down in Richard's chair opposite him. Tom waited, thinking she would question him, but she said nothing. Only he knew she could not be oblivious of his remark; for there was apparent to him a vague something, like an electric current in the air, emanating from her still form.

"They all think, up in London, that you don't know anything about it. But I know better than that," Tom continued. "You're not one to miss much that goes on under your nose, now are you? I daresay you've noticed even to-night——"

He paused. He could see her face now, it was in the line of light streaming through the window behind him. She was staring at him, and there was a kind of fascination in her gaze. He felt, rather than saw the tense rigidity of her body. He waited and she formed a word with her lips.

"Yes?" she said quietly.

Tom experienced a sudden irritation. She was so cold, so lifeless; would nothing move her?

"You noticed, I s'pose, that he wouldn't let me speak to her to-night. Kept pullin' her chair over by him. My God! not that I wanted to talk to her when I could talk to you. But you notice he didn't care if I talked to you. You weren't his concern. But her! He didn't want me to even touch her. Afraid of my pollutin' her, I expect. Oh, Lord! That's funny. Pollutin' that little——" He saw Irene shudder and stopped.

"I don't mean to carry tales," he began again after a little, in an aggrieved voice, "but you saw the way he acted to-night. Wasn't concerned about you at all. Now that isn't right. And you ought to wipe his eye for him, that's what you ought to do."

Irene leant suddenly back in her chair and her face was lost again in the shadow. But Tom had more to say:

"I've said I'm not one to carry tales, and that's true. But all the same I hate to see a woman made a monkey of like you are, 'specially a damned pretty woman like yourself, who could have any number of affairs of her

own if she cared to. That's what I mean when I say you ought to wipe his eye."

For a moment the light struck Irene's face once more, and Tom saw on it a little smile of contempt. It nettled him.

"Oh, of course it's all right if you don't mind. If you like the way they go on together. But you musn't wonder if people begin askin' questions. If they ask what those two are doin' up there in the old tower every day."

There passed over Irene's face a curious look. The smile died from her lips; and Tom was again aware of that strange electric current vibrating between them.

"Tower? What tower?" Her voice, almost a whisper, waked in him a sensation almost of fear.

"Oh, I don't know." He tried to bluster. "That old tower, a sort of ruin up the coast a bit. They were comin' out of there when I passed to-day. It's a meeting-place they've got for themselves, I expect. D'you mean you don't know about it?"

"I don't believe you." Her voice, cold and hard as granite, struck across his consciousness like a blow. But it was fuel to his anger.

"Oh!" he cried, "you don't believe me! Well, you just ask the farmers around there, they see 'em often enough, I'll wager. They're not likely to tell you what isn't so. You ask 'em."

He leaned forward, forcing his heavy bloated face before her. His hair, which he had ruffled at the temples into a vague resemblance to horns, gave him a Satanic expression. His eyes, grotesque in the murky light, leered at her.

"What do you suppose they do there in the tower all afternoon? All alone there like that? What do

you suppose they're doin' now down there at the other end of the terrace, in the dark, so close together?"

"Oh, don't!" It was a strangely stifled tone in which she said it. Suddenly she covered her face with her hands; shudder after shudder ran through her body.

Tom watched her with a strange feeling of fear. He did not understand emotion like this, and wished heartily that she would pull herself together. He had seen a good many women cry, but their tears, like Flora's, were cataclysmic. He did not understand this terrible subdued emotion. He felt frightened at the effect he had produced,—awed and cowed. What had he done? What had he been saying? It was a relief to him when he looked up and saw Richard and Gloria approaching from the other end of the terrace.

They drew near and instantly Irene became herself again. No one demurred against Richard's suggestion that they go home, but of the four perhaps it was Tom who was most relieved when the familiar outlines of the farm appeared in sight. He himself was staying the night at Rydnor, so the car, after dropping the others, took him on to the "Beecher Arms." And as he went Tom swore to himself:

"If ever, again, I'm such a blank, blank fool!"

But by morning he had begun to think of himself, once more, as something of a hero.

## CHAPTER XVII

### IRENE AT THE TOWER

ALL that night Irene revolved in her mind what Tom had told her. She lay on her back in the little white upper room of the cottage, staring at the tops of the curtains on the window opposite and keeping very quiet so as not to awaken Richard. The idea of Richard awake and perhaps talking to her was insupportable. She would have suffered anything rather than that. But Richard slept heavily, the sleep of a man physically tired.

Irene tried not to give credence to Tom's words, yet instinctively she knew that what he had told her was true. But could he be right about the tower? How odious he was! There slowly welled up in her a dull resentment against him, that rather unfair resentment which it is natural to feel towards tale-bearers, as if he, rather than Richard, were responsible for her sufferings.

She lay in the darkness listening to Richard's steady breathing. There was something terrible to her in the faint rhythmic sound, accustomed though she was to hearing it. She turned restlessly on her side and Richard in his turn moved. The rhythmic sounds ceased for a moment, and something like terror gripped Irene's throat. Then the steady breathing began again. Richard had not wakened.

Irene was out early, before breakfast, walking on the sands. There was still no one stirring when she

turned back towards the house. And then, quite suddenly, the idea came to her! She would go to the tower herself. She would go look at this place about which everyone talked. She would go see for herself. Then she would be better able to judge of Tom's story. She would go now, before anyone was up.

It was a long walk to the tower for a woman of Irene's sedentary habits, but the day was fine and the interest she felt in her quest upheld and strengthened her.

The air along the cliff path was cool and crisp, blowing fresh from the sea. The larks rose singing above her head and the ocean itself was a dappled silver and grey. The sea-gulls sat silently preening themselves on the rocks or floated like buoys on the crests of the waves. One large bird, unaware of her approach until she was all but upon it, started up with a loud cackling in front of her. But otherwise the cliff path was quite deserted.

It came upon her suddenly,—the tower,—more as if it had come to her than she to it. It rose sheer and gaunt, a sentinel guarding the expanse of the downs, its many-leaved covering of ivy fluttering in the breeze. It looked very grim and blank to Irene gazing curiously upward from the shadow in which she stood. As many another had done, she wondered vaguely of its history, and whose was the hand that reared it. Perhaps it had been a prison where men incarcerated their fellow-men? Or it might have been a convent where melancholy pale-faced nuns sighed out their miserable lives, longing for the renounced pomps and vanities of the world, for jewels, perhaps, and lovers—Lovers! Ah—! With a little shiver, Irene pushed back the sagging door and stepped inside.



It was very chill and damp here. Irene fancied she could detect the odour of fungus growing somewhere near. On the wall opposite a vein of moisture had crept along the surface of the stone like a long evil mark. The wind rustled in the ivy outside and rattled against the door, setting it swinging ever so slightly. Irene felt cold, and all at once very much afraid. But of what, she could not have said. Perhaps of the memories of the place, some haunting ghost of long-dead happiness left here and forgotten.

The thin line of moisture on the wall opposite collected itself into a single drop and fell with a soft thud upon the stone beneath. Irene shivered again. It was beastly here, alone. Could they possibly like it enough, those two, to ever make love here? Was it different when two people were here together,—two people in love?

In love! He was not really in love with Gloria, she told herself vehemently. It was a mere delusion of the senses, a momentary infatuation, midsummer madness, that was all!

And she must save him! Save him from that girl and from himself. But how?

She looked about her at the broken uneven line of the staircase, at the broken windows where the tangled vines had entered, at the single pallid lily drooping on its tall stem in the crevice of the rock; and to her orderly mind this seemed a fit place for the indulgence of guilty love.

And yet she would not call it that, this affection between Richard and Gloria. It was not guilty, but infinitely pathetic and terrible. How terrible, she dared not think. She was hurt and sore, yet she felt curiously little resentment against Gloria. That child

would get over it, but Richard was *hers*, she wanted to protect him, that was all.

A sudden rustling and movement behind her made her start back terrified. She experienced a moment's faintness; then she saw that it was only a squirrel which had run in beneath the door and was seeking among the little heap of dried leaves in the corner for a stray bit of food.

But the alarm it had caused her was sufficient to make her wish to remain no longer in the gloomy place. For gloomy it was. The windows were all on the west side, so that while the setting sun, piercing through the chinks and crannies and the open casements in the wall, could make of the interior a glory as of the celestial regions, the Puritan morning sun did not enter at all. It was like a different place.

Irene stepped hastily through the doorway brushing past the iron-studded door which swung to behind her with a creaking sigh. She drew a long breath in the open air. Good to leave that dismal abode of suspicion behind; good to be out in the sun once more! With a slight shake of her shoulders, as if throwing off the evil influence of the place, and without once looking back, Irene hastened homeward.

Yet the visit had somehow relieved her mind.

She found they had all breakfasted by the time she reached home. Embarrassed lest they should question her too much, she pretended to have taken her own breakfast at Dudley Farm, some two miles down the road,—where, indeed, she had stopped for a glass of milk. But neither Richard nor Gloria made any further enquiries concerning her movements.

After her visit to the tower, Irene felt calmer. It was not that she had found there anything to reassure

her, but now at least she knew what she should know. Anything is better than uncertainty on a subject near to one's heart. There is even a certain satisfaction in having one's worst fears corroborated. Something of this conviction came to Irene as, during the remainder of the day, she busied herself with the simple household tasks, such as mending her linen, her own and Richard's socks, and the occasional stitching of a tablecloth, the hemming of which she had set herself as vacation work. During the morning she could watch from her window Richard and Gloria pacing too and fro on the beach before the house. There was nothing lover-like or unusual in their attitude towards one another. Tom had not arrived on the scene to-day, and Irene's suspicions began to be lulled into quiescence.

But as the hours passed, the calmness commenced to leave her. A little after noon the weather changed, and Irene's mood seemed to change with it. The fine promise of the morning was broken by an atmosphere heavily charged with storm. And there was storm in Irene's soul as well.

It was with a sickening feeling that she saw the other two depart on their daily afternoon walk. She wanted desperately to say she would join them, to offer her company; but since that first day she had never heretofore done so, and she felt self-conscious about it. She dreaded speaking the words before Gloria's candid eyes. It was as if she herself were the guilty one.

When the sky clouded over, while they were still at the luncheon table, in her heart dimly foreseeing this pain which must follow their desertion of her, she had hoped passionately that the rain would fall to stop their going. If it rained before they could start, they

might abandon the idea of going. As anxiously as Gloria she scanned the surrounding sky.

But out of the glassy heavens no drops fell. The breeze had ceased altogether and the sky, dulling to a monotonous yellow-white, appeared to be stretched over tight, close to their heads, like the roof of a tent, crushing one with a sense of oppression. The air was heavy, stagnant.

Irene sat by her window until the walkers were long out of sight; sat there with folded hands striving to regain that lost calm of the morning. But her efforts were fruitless. At length she felt that she could no longer bear it within doors.

She went out and walked along the little strip of beach where Gloria and Richard had walked that morning; but so lifeless and oppressive was the outer air that with every slightest movement she felt the perspiration clinging in beads of moisture to her face and limbs. Even breathing was difficult.

Irene moved slowly, her eyes on the sand. She felt restless and ill at ease. There was something terrifying in the weight of the sunless air, and the waves troubled her with their incessant motion. She wanted them stilled for a moment so she could think things out. Irene pressed her hand to her forehead. She must think! Oh, why wouldn't the sea stop just for one little moment so that she could think? The heat was suffocating. And very gradually she forgot about the sea.

As before, when she thought of them together, it was with curiously little resentment against Gloria. And for Richard she felt only a kind of pity. Pity that so unhappy an emotion should stir one so true and upright by nature. Pity that she herself should have

failed him so utterly. For she felt that in some measure it must be that.

Was she too old? Ah, if only she were as young as Gloria! She had felt no anguish for herself at the approach of age but now it was different. She returned to her room and studied her features in the little crooked mirror hanging over the washhand-stand. There was nothing reflected therein which might fright a normal observer, yet she turned away with a sigh.

Dumbly she appreciated Gloria's appeal to Richard. "Deep," Aunt Hildegarde had said she was, but Irene knew it was not that. She was only young. Ah! that was it,—young!

She sat down by her window again, and her imagination followed those two along the path by the low wall of cliffs. Would they pause as she had done by the edge of the headland to look out over the sea of glass, so peculiarly opaque in appearance, grey, mystically beautiful, lying languid and supine beneath the brooding heavens?

Or would they hurry on, impatient and eager for the touch of one another's hands in the cool seclusion of the tower? Were their spirits, already enlaced, urging them to hasten, beckoning, encouraging, promising,—along the cliffs,—along the paths——?

She started up with a cry.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### STORM

FROM the upper room of the ruined tower, Richard and Gloria came down the old stone steps hand in hand. Over the last three, which had crumbled into a heap at the foot of the staircase, Richard leapt lightly, and then holding out his arms to Gloria, swung her in a wide sweep to the floor.

She always gave a little gasp of delight at this performance. It was just like flying, she told Richard.

They stood for a few minutes in the shadowed gloom of the lower floor holding each other's hands and looking about them with eyes grown suddenly unfamiliar with the scene. The oppressive heat seemed to have penetrated into the interior of the tower. There was a dank stickiness about the walls in place of the usual refreshing coolness.

Gloria noted all this with a certain petulance. They had come as usual to the tower in spite of the weather, chiefly because she had wished it, but, taken all in all, it had been an unsatisfactory day. Richard had been just as kind as usual, but they were both feeling "offish." Richard had remarked that a day like this played the devil with one's nerves, and she supposed that must be it.

From the upper window they had seen the rain clouds piling up in the western sky. If they hurried, Richard said, they might get home before the storm broke. He held the door open for her.

Just inside the doorway Gloria paused and, stooping, picked up something white which lay on the cracked stone floor. She turned it over in her hands and then, without a word, handed it to Richard. It was Irene's handkerchief.

Gloria and Richard looked dumbly at one another. There was a slight frown on Richard's forehead. Gloria's eyes searched his face, but she was unable to comprehend the expression she saw there,—an expression sorrowful and a little resentful.

He thrust the handkerchief suddenly into his pocket. "Come," he said abruptly; and, taking her arm, he drew her quickly through the doorway.

Whether Richard had expected to find Irene outside is uncertain. That at some time since their last visit she had been there was evident. But now there was not a soul in sight. All was as it had been when they entered the building a half-hour or so before, except that the sky had dulled to a greyish yellow, and in the west the heavy storm-clouds were gathering fast. There appeared to be a deathly stillness in the air, a stillness presaging sound. As they hurried along the cliffs the sea stretched before them opaque and glassy, of an ugly muddy green. It was almost motionless.

Then far out over the water there began a faint murmuring; the wind, which had been silent so long, arising from its sleep at the approach of the storm, and the moaning of the tides in conflict.

Richard drew Gloria along at a rapid pace. Once or twice he said "we must go faster" and Gloria at times had difficulty in keeping up with him. He had said that unless they hurried the storm would overtake them, but in his heart was a nameless dread which urged him along faster than any fear of the storm

could do. Irene had been there at the tower. But when? And for what purpose?

There rose in rapid succession before his mind's eye pictures of his early life with Irene and memories of incidents, trifling in themselves, but bound up inseparably with his very real love for her. Collectively they represented his most cherished ideals. He turned again to Gloria.

"Hurry!" he said again.

The scudding rain-clouds drew nearer. The sky was a grey cowl drawn over the head of the world. They walked in silence. Now and again Gloria, stooping, would pluck a wisp of the coarse dune-grass and draw it between her lips. She looked at Richard's back as he trudged along ahead of her. There was something in the square set of his shoulders which vaguely displeased her.

Before they reached home it was raining.

Gloria had entered the sitting-room first. There was no one there. "Irene!" she called. But there was no answer. Gloria went out into the hall and ran up the stairs. Standing before the closed door: "Irene!" she called again.

Richard brushed past her into the bedroom. The windows had been thoughtfully shut against the rain, and the lowering sky outside let through so little light that the room was almost dark. But it was quite empty.

Irene's boxes, strapped and ready, stood in the centre of the room. The dressing table was denuded of her toilet articles, and all those little silver-topped jars and bottles in which Irene revelled, were gone.

Richard strode over to the closet and flung open the door. Irene's dresses had all been taken down from



the hooks on which they habitually rested. The empty coat-hangers rattled mournfully against one another in the draught created by the opening of the door.

Richard dropped the knob and came back to the dressing-table, glancing rapidly about. Her dressing-case? Gone. There was no doubt about it, Irene had fled.

He went slowly back to the sitting-room whither Gloria had retired. She was sitting with her hands clasped in her lap, occupying the little low chair by the window where Irene usually sat. Richard sank into the one opposite.

"Irene's left!"

In the dull lodging-house room, dark with the rain-drops beating against the windows, their eyes met across the grey gloom of the room. And suddenly the little carpeted space between them widened. Miles and miles away they seemed to see each other with faintly ironical eyes, surprised, staring. Richard raised his hand to his lips, and to Gloria the gesture was incredibly slow, like the grotesque gestures seen in dreams. They appeared to contemplate one another with the pale half-interest of disembodied spirits.

And all the inanimate things around them reflected the subtle change in them. The same clock ticked on the mantelpiece but with unusual loudness, heard even above the pelting of the rain. And, above the clock, in the steel engraving the raven still fed the emaciated Elijah. Yet everything wore an unfamiliar look, the books on the table, the row of candlesticks along the top of the cupboard, even the sewing on which Irene had been working and which she had forgotten.

With a sudden shake, Richard rose and rang the bell for the landlady.

At what time had Mrs. Baldwin left the house?

She had left, it seemed, about four, with Mr. Tom Baldwin. Yes sir, the gentleman who dined with them last evening.

Richard concealed his surprise from the woman. Martha, had she gone with her mistress?

The landlady shook her head. No, she had not taken Martha. Would he wish to speak to Martha himself? She was in the kitchen at present helping with the dinner, but she could come in a moment.

Richard shook his head and muttered something about only fearing the rain might have overtaken them. The landlady went out again, leaving him alone with Gloria.

She did not speak to him. He was busy looking up trains in the Railway Guide. Presently he found what he sought.

"I am going up to London to-night." He had not raised his eyes from the book.

"May I come too?" Gloria asked half timidly.

"If you like." He answered her absently.

The rain storm, which had caught Richard and Gloria half way home, did not break until Irene and Tom were seated in the railway carriage. Then it came down in floods. They were alone, and the noise of the raindrops beating on the roof of the carriage was very loud, for they talked but little.

It was strange to Irene that she should be here at all. Even now she could not be sure how it had all come about, nor what the fate that had sent Tom there just at the psychological moment, so that she should, for the time being, depend upon him whom, of all men, she least trusted.

It had just seemed as if something had snapped

inside of her, the secret spring which works each of us according as the master hand pulls the wires. And all at once she had wanted to get away,—out of it,—back to London. And Tom had offered to take her. He had asked no questions. It did not occur to Irene to wonder at this, so upset and confused was she. And now they were in the train going back home to London. She had no idea as yet what she meant to do when she got there.

She sat staring straight before her; her hands lay listlessly in her lap. "Devilish pretty," thought Tom, as he watched her from behind the paper he was pretending to read.

They had been lucky, he thought, to get a carriage to themselves. And yet he had not been able to make quite the progress he had hoped. He looked at her again over the top of the paper and mentally wondered at her silence. Distant, that's what she was. He'd have to go carefully. Last night he had fancied that he had made a bad impression. But he might have been mistaken. He had had a lot of wine, and he was apt to be too bold under those conditions. Then he had thought her cold; but it wasn't that. She was distant, that was all. And she'd had a hard knock. He could tell that by the look on her face. Well he must right that! Poor thing, she ought to have some comfort.

He leaned forward stealthily and took her hand in his. She paid no attention. She was watching the spattering raindrops on the window, and the trees, distorted by the wind, racing alongside. As a matter of fact, she was not aware that he had touched her. Tom took her acquiescence, however, as a sign of encour-

agement. He had rather expected a rebuff, and as a result he threw prudence to the winds.

"What are you goin' to do all alone up in London, anyway?"

Irene did not answer. Tom gave the hand he held in his a furtive pressure.

"I say, we might go back down to Brighton, together, you and I."

Irene said nothing. He saw that she hadn't seemed to hear, hadn't been listening, in fact. He repeated:

"What d'you say to our going there to-night, you and I?"

"Where?" She had turned now.

"Brighton." He was glad to have secured her attention at last.

"Brighton," she repeated vaguely. "What for?"

Tom, who never believed in any woman's innocence, was amazed at her stupidity. There was almost a leer on his face.

"You ought to pay him back!"

Irene turned fully around and looked at him, drawing away her hand.

"Go away!" She half whispered the words. "Go away, and don't ever speak to me again!" The horror of her look penetrated even Tom's armour of self-complacence. He drew back, checked and mortified.

With roar and whistle the train rushed on towards London. Irene sat huddled over in one corner of the compartment, her eyes fixed on vacancy, not heeding or caring as they rushed through town or village or country. It was all the same to her. She did not look again in Tom's direction.

The man whose offer of affection she had rebuffed, sprawled in the opposite corner, his hands thrust into

his pockets. He was angry with himself and with Irene. How the devil, he asked himself, was he to know? Most women would have been grateful in the circumstances. Anyway she needn't take it like that! There hadn't been any bones broken. People oughtn't to make such a fuss about nothing. It was absurd. And she had looked at him as though he had been a viper, or some other obscene animal. It was disgustin', when you thought about it.

He looked at his watch. Well, thank the Lord this beastly journey was about over. He'd be glad to get the thing off his hands.

Sulkily he stole a look at Irene. She was still staring straight before her with that stony expression of injury. Then, as he watched, he saw a tear creep out from under her lashes and run down her cheek. She removed it stealthily with her handkerchief, as if afraid that he might see it. Tom in turn looked out at the thudding raindrops. Let her cry, he didn't care. He had tried to be decent to her and she turned him down. Let her cry then, damn her! Damn her! Damn all women! Damn! Damn! Damn!

When Richard and Gloria reached London the lights of the city were already twinkling through the thick vapours of fog. The rain had ceased some time back, but a cloud-like mist floated, miasmic, over the town, enveloping everything in a soft grey veil.

Richard was already tugging at the door of the carriage before the guard let them out. He whistled to a cabman.

"Here,—in here." He hastily opened the door and Gloria stepped quickly inside. Richard sprang in after

her. He shouted the address to the driver, and in a moment they were on their way.

The farther they went, the thicker the mist seemed to become. As the fog deepened, wave after wave of cold dread entered Gloria's heart. It seemed an age before they at last drew up before the door in Prince's Gate.

The door was standing a little way open. At the rear of the hall a thin gas jet gleamed wanly. The rest of the house, the front of it at least, was in darkness.

Richard dashed in, pushing the door wide. He had scarcely waited for the cab to stop before he alighted. He had forgotten to pay the driver, and mechanically Gloria paused to give him his money. She waved away the change he offered her. She wanted him out of the way. Something sick within her wished to be rid of his calm incurious face. She was unduly aware of the scrutiny of strangers.

But to Richard it had not mattered. Nothing mattered. There was only the open door, the little square hall with its flickering gas jet, the dark empty dining-room; and then a sudden low sob, and Irene stumbling, fumbling, into his arms.

In the street Gloria stood staring at the open door. A voice at her elbow startled her. She turned quickly. It was Tom Baldwin standing there beside her. He looked from her to the open door, and his little eyes twinkled maliciously. Gloria took a step past him, but he put a detaining hand on her arm. His sardonic humour demanded expression.

"How would you like to go to Brighton with me, eh?"

Without a word Gloria went past him up the steps.

As she turned to shut the door behind her she saw him still standing there before the house, laughing silently to himself.

Gloria paused for a moment in the little square hall. In the room on the right she could hear Irene sobbing and Richard's voice soothing her.

With her hands pressed tightly against her ears to keep out the sound, like a little whipped dog, she crept up the stairs to her room.

## CHAPTER XIX

### GLORIA ON HER OWN

IRENE tried to make her voice as firm as possible. "I think that Gloria had better leave us."

Richard said nothing. He sat with his eyes cast down and a slight frown puckering his forehead. It was in the week following their return to London.

"Simeon tells me," Irene continued, "that her money affairs are in a very bad way. Her grandfather, it seems, wasn't very prudent in his investments. Of course Gloria hasn't quite finished that kindergarten course she was taking, but I think she is quite far enough along to start safely if she wishes to; and if she is going to attempt to make her own living, as she has planned, it would be better if she were to begin at once. Don't you think so?"

Still Richard said nothing.

"Don't you think so?" Irene repeated.

Richard looked up with a sudden shake of his shoulders.

"Oh yes, I suppose so."

The subject which Irene had at last had the courage to broach, had been troubling him for some time past. He knew that Gloria ought to leave the house; and yet, all considerations aside, he hated to have her do so. It seemed somehow so callous to turn her out like this. For that is what it would amount to.

He knew even better than Simeon the state her affairs were in, but it was not this that worried him.



What Irene had said was perfectly true, but all that could be got around. But it was the little intimacies and rencontres of their family life that he knew Gloria would miss, the daily exchange of greetings and all the little familiar trivialities. It was not that he would not see her, he would see her very often, of course. But he knew that she would suffer, and from childhood Richard had hated hurting anything. What would she do by herself all day, poor child? And yet Irene was right. She ought to go.

Irene had been watching his face. "Perhaps I would better speak to her to-morrow," she said quietly.

Richard rose hastily. "No," he said, "I'll tell her. A few minutes later he left the room. Irene sighed.

It was Isabel who bore the tidings to Aunts Letty and Hildegarde that Gloria had left Richard's house, and this within a week of their rather precipitate return from Rydnor.

Not only had she left, but she had taken lodgings all by herself in a little house just off the Brompton Road. Isabel was of the opinion that this in itself was suspicious. She added that there was no doubt in her mind that Tom could tell them more of what had happened, for was he not down at Rydnor himself when all these things must have been decided?

Whether he knew anything about it or not, Tom remained discreetly silent. The memory of that look Irene had given him in the train deterred him. Nor did it seem to him in looking back at the whole matter that he had shone very well in the affair. So he held his tongue.

But the matter was much talked of in family circles. No one said anything outright of course. The Bald-

wins of this world do not air their less perfect linen in public. But they agreed among themselves that it was all very unfortunate. And to take lodgings all by herself! Dear, dear!

"I daresay Richard will be a frequent visitor in Chapel Street!" remarked Mrs. John significantly, when the arrangement was explained to her.

Hildegarde Baldwin nodded her head slowly in token of agreeing. "A sly designing minx! I never trusted her."

The girl had been to see Simeon, it seemed, and he had told her she ought to get to work. There wasn't enough of Nathan's money left to support her properly unless she did. Simeon was quite definite as to that part of it, but no one put a great deal of faith in what was said about money. For hadn't there been nothing at all for her to pay while she was at Richard's? And lodgings, no matter how simple and inexpensive, cost more than nothing at all. No indeed, there was something more at the bottom of it than that! Yes, in spite of all this talk about starting a kindergarten.

The news spread rapidly. Of them all, perhaps Aunt Letty was the most shocked. She thought about it a great deal, and feared that the worst she had suspected was true. Only think! To repay all Irene's kindness like that!

It did not occur to any of them, being Baldwins to the bone, that man, granted a modicum of imagination, will occasionally meet with forces outside the normal round of emotions, before the intangible loveliness of which duty and habitude flee away; that there may bind him magic filaments, gossamer as the threads spun from the mists of the dawn, yet in their strength

mightier than Death itself. Those God-fearing people, —members of the Clan Baldwin, had never known, or else had forgotten, that Life can hold emotions more vital, more exigent even than those ideals of loyalty so sedulously instilled into the Baldwin youth. For such novel ideas are contrary to the Baldwin ethics. They, good substantial people, are notably lacking in imagination and its attendant satellite sentiment, as lacking in this unnecessary attribute (for it has no real money value) as they are strong in its arch-enemy, common-sense. So they mocked or wondered or shrugged their shoulders according to their several natures, and life went on as usual.

It was some satisfaction to them, however, that Richard should seem so upset over the matter. He visibly lost weight; and Sharlie told of having seen him sitting all alone on a bench in Kensington Gardens, frowning to himself, and so wrapt up in his own reflections that he quite failed to see her, although she had passed him twice, quite close (so as to make sure it was he), and there had not been another soul in sight. Invited to describe how he looked, Sharlie had replied, after a moment's thought, that he "looked as though something was after him!"

All of this gossip, needless to say, was confined to the family. There was as yet no outward scandal, and there were times when even the family doubted. When, for instance, it was learned that in the first two weeks after she had commenced her own housekeeping, Gloria had dined twice with Richard and Irene in Prince's Gate, the affair was somehow complicated. Irene too, when delicately sounded, expressed positive regard for Gloria. She had made a charming guest, Irene had said in reply to Mrs. John's solicitous inquiry. No,

not at all troublesome. Yes, of course, she was a little young still, but that would pass.

There was evidently not much to be got from Irene!

She did not tell them that Gloria had dined with them at Richard's request, nor how she herself had wondered at the acceptance.

To Gloria, there was nothing incongruous in her going to Irene's. She went for the simple pleasure it gave her to be again with Richard, seated at the same table and enjoying the old time familiarity. She realised vaguely that Irene could not be expected to like her overmuch. She herself accepted Irene as a fact. She did not definitely object to her, nor was she conscious of any disloyalty. Her love, like herself, was headstrong and imperious. No pale image of Irene, sorrowing or reproachful, came to haunt her nights or days, no accusing finger was stretched towards her by a remorseful conscience to point out the fact that she had done her cousin's wife an injury. She was simply incapable of thinking of Irene at all. Or if she did, it was to call to mind the fact that Irene had Richard fast and forevermore. What more could a woman want?

She had never meant to take Richard away from Irene. That idea had never entered her head. There might have been a hundred Irene's; it was Richard she cared about. She could think of nothing but Richard. She was long since beyond caring what Irene felt or thought.

Not that she would willfully have hurt her. Only now that Richard had once loved her, and knew so well that she in turn loved him, there did not seem to her that anything could be done about it. It was as

if her great love for him had won her an inalienable right to his affection.

She knew that he himself suffered alternate pangs of remorse and shame, but for her there was only one dread,—that fateful widening of the space which had opened between them that night when she and Richard returned to the lodging-house to find Irene gone.

She had been sorry about it all. She cared for Irene, too, in a way, but not like this,—not the way she cared for Richard. With improvident extravagance, she lived in the joy of the present. She had been sorry to leave Richard's house, but only because it meant that now she would see less of him. Her philosophy was summed up in the fact that Richard had asked her to love him, and now nothing, neither he nor Irene, nor her own passionate willful self could stop it. As with a heavy train set in motion on a steep hill, there was nothing to do but let her love have its way. She couldn't stop it. She didn't want to stop it. And it did not occur to her that she ought to want to. She was too young, too inexperienced, to appreciate the inevitable reaction which must follow her satisfying of Richard's hunger. Improvidently she lived in the present. The pleasure of playing hostess to Richard in her own dwelling, the tiny two rooms which she had taken and decorated with an eye to pleasing him in every detail; the joy of hearing his footsteps on the stair and running to meet him; an occasional stroll with him in the park,—these were sufficient to her, for the present at least.

In the house in Prince's Gate alone, no mention was made of the affair. Since the night of Irene's flight from Rydnor, and the subsequent departure of

Gloria from the house, her name had scarcely been mentioned by the two remaining.

Irene understood perfectly well that the dismissal of Gloria had by no means brought an end to anything. She knew that Richard still saw Gloria frequently, at her rooms and elsewhere, that he had indeed helped her to select her lodgings. Yet she made no mention of the fact.

There were times when Irene would have liked to forget the restraint of breeding which was so indissolubly a part of her that it seemed to run in her veins like blood, and to descend to the level of her humbler sisters; times when she longed for the courage to "have it out," as the saying is. But the desire was never strong enough to conquer that innate fastidiousness which kept her silent. As much as Richard, she dreaded "scenes" and, being thoroughly modern, she shrank from making an indecent exposure of her soul. Or it may be, as well, that she dared not put it to the test, fearing defeat before the terrible weapon wielded by her adversary,—youth. So she did not mention Gloria's name; she said nothing of the doubts that haunted her night and day.

It was evident to her also, that Richard was not happy. It grieved her to see the deepening of that austere look which had thrilled her so in days gone by, to observe the multiplying of the tiny network of wrinkles about his eyes. She could not quite tell whether she was glad or sorry to know that he suffered as well as she.

Yet a stranger watching them would never have guessed at this inward struggle going on within each individual bosom as they sat at dinner on a warm night in late September. Only it showed a very little in the

slightly strained expression in Richard's eyes, and in the tightening of the muscles about his mouth. Otherwise they gave no sign.

The dinner progressed calmly. Soup, fish and entrée followed one another, were dexterously served and silently removed again, accompanied by the casual inconsequent conversation of persons who see each other daily; adequate, yet somehow lacking in spontaneity. They missed Gloria's light chatter. With an inward pang Irene recognised this. She knew that Richard had felt it too, for her eyes followed his to where the empty chair brooded beside the table.

A sudden heart-ache gripped her, and in consequence she began to speak rapidly in order to cover the situation. A new musician was in process of being "discovered." Isabel was interested. She had been enlisted by Lady Coke to help try to launch him. Irene had heard him that afternoon at Mrs. Dunning's. A sort of trial performance. He really played well; quite an unusual technique, only his playing didn't seem quite to grip one, was lacking in that divine fire. Did Richard understand what she meant? He wanted feeling, passion.

Richard listened absently. He was thinking: "Poor little girl, all by herself to-night. I wonder if she's getting enough to eat?" Then, casually raising his eyes, he met Irene's. She dropped hers immediately, but not before she had let him see that she read his thoughts, nor before he too had caught a glimpse of that inner soul, to make him cry again in his misery: "Alas! poor Irene!"

The conversation drooped.

If only they could speak out what was in their hearts. If only she might cry, "See, it is I, your wife, who

loves you. Do not leave me. Do not forget all that you owe me of tenderness and affection, bred of joys and griefs shared in common!" If only it were open to him to reply: "I love youth and Life. I care for you still, but *they* are more to me than this outworn love of yours which I have never doubted, more than any cold sense of duty." Irene struggled against the temptation and played with her coffee spoon.

"It is stifling here. Let us go outside." She rose and he followed her out into the little open sun-parlour with its overhanging grape vine.

She stood for a moment, silent before one of the open windows, letting the soft breeze play upon her forehead, gazing out into the night and the darkness. Richard came behind her and straightened the light shawl over her shoulders. At the touch of his hand on her bare neck, Irene shrank back. In a sudden access of emotion, she turned and left him, running up the stairs to her room.

Here Irene stood with her hands tightly pressed together. Turning on the light over her dressing-table, she leaned close to the glass. She pressed her hands tight to her forehead, pulling back the skin on either side of her temples. Held taut like this, the white skin showed no wrinkles.

Irene caught her breath in a sudden sob. Why had she left Richard like that? The thought came to her that he might go out if she did not return to him.

She leaned close to the glass once more and forced her lips slowly and painfully into a smile. She held it there, staring at herself in the mirror, until she was perfectly satisfied. Then, turning off the light, she went calmly down the stairs.

Richard had left the sun-parlour and moved out into



the little enclosed court which served them as a garden. She could see him sitting under the tiny plane-tree with its awning parasol, like a petticoat, above his head,—a shadowy figure in the darkness, his lighted cigar making a spot of colour in the surrounding gloom and his white shirt-front faintly gleaming.

Quietly Irene crossed the little paved yard and put her hand on Richard's shoulder. Without a word he drew her down to sit beside him, and thus side by side they sat there, wrapped in the soft September dusk.

## CHAPTER XX

### ON THE EMBANKMENT

RICHARD went with a slight feeling of hypocrisy to keep an appointment with Gloria on the Embankment. Frankly, had it been left to his own choice, he would rather not have gone, for meetings such as this one (they had grown more frequent recently), made him feel unpleasantly furtive. He knew this because he was glad to be reasonably certain that, on this occasion at least, no one was likely to observe him. He disliked feeling this way, and especially in connection with Gloria. Secrecy was not a component part of his nature. To be forced into it offended his conscience.

And the girl, too, had troubled him of late. She hadn't really what he called good sense. Naturally one couldn't expect great wisdom in one of her years and temperament, but,—well, look at it! For instance, she had been three or four times to the house.

Not that there was any open enmity between her and Irene. Irene was always pleasant to her, but he knew that she could not but regard the girl's coming there, after what had occurred, as embarrassing. And it distressed him that Gloria should so lay herself open to the charge of being wanting in taste. His love for her was real enough to make him most keenly sensible of the opinions of others towards her, and he hated to have it in anyone's power to criticise her.

It was better, of course, that the friendship between the two women should not appear to outsiders to have

come to an end, but Gloria was a trifle too impulsive, a thought indiscreet. It was partly to save her from the results of this situation that he had seen so much of her in Chapel Street. He made it a rule never to stay very long. He was sorry that she seemed to depend so much upon him. It would have been less awkward had she possessed more friends. Irene had not yet brought herself to visit the girl in her new abode. Richard had once or twice found himself making excuses for her not having come, and wondered at himself as he did so.

He loved the girl still. But that experience with Irene on the night she fled from Rydnor and subsequently, had shown him various things. However, Gloria had said she wanted to see him, and he had set this place as a rendezvous.

He knew that she had had some idea of opening a kindergarten. That would employ her mind. In the last week she had spoken often of it. Susan Bixby had agreed to help her buy the necessary furniture, supplies and things; a room had been engaged on the ground floor of the house in Chapel Street, and Isabel Hartley had promised to speak to various friends of hers to try to influence them to send their children. If he remembered rightly, to-day was to be the opening day, and it might be concerning this that she wanted to consult him. He was glad that she had had the courage to try her hand at something. It would do her good and employ her mind. He had no doubt that she would make a success of it. She had a natural gift for childhood, for was she not a child herself?

Richard walked on, and came presently to the Embankment. He had cut across the Temple gardens, lying serene in the mellow afternoon sunlight. It was

just at the close of one of those wistful autumn days which still retain the semblance of summer before it vanishes. He saw the city river, girt about still with summer trees; and only the faint rustling and lipping of their leaves above his head told how the frost had already been among them. Now and then a single faded one among its fellows stained the sidewalk.

The early autumnal dusk was not far off. Richard walked rapidly, a faint pucker of concern showing between his eyebrows. He saw only vaguely the long attenuated shadows of the lamp-posts and the arches of Waterloo bridge shadowy grey, spanning a flood of molten gold, with a thin mist rising above it; and sensed, without heeding, the faint acrid smell of burning leaves from one of the parks or squares over yonder,—that most typical of autumn odours.

But Richard had not much time for any of these things. He kept looking ahead. At last he saw her, seated quietly on a bench, waiting his coming. But she was not looking eagerly towards him. It was the first time that he remembered her not jumping up and running forward to welcome his approach. But to-night she was sitting very still, gazing straight before her at the misty river. She looked amazingly small and childlike sitting there like that, her hands folded in her lap and the curling locks slipping out from under her tam o' shanter.

Even in the dusky light he could see that she had been crying, although her lips curved into a smile as she looked up at him. He dropped into the seat beside her and took her hand in his. She nestled up close to him, tucking herself in intimately under his shoulder. She seemed strangely dear to him to-night, and the thought troubled him as it had done before. What

would be the end of all this? But he said nothing of his doubts to her.

"You wanted to see me about something?"

"Yes, but don't let's talk about it just yet. I'll tell you later. Let's sit here like this for a little while without talking."

In silence they watched the sullen waters light to crimson in the last dying rays of the sun. Above them a little warning lisp of the trees, and then the dusk began to creep about them, the soft autumnal dusk.

A breath of cold air on the back of his neck woke Richard to a sense of how the time was passing. Gloria, he knew, would sit here like this forever if she were permitted. He turned to her.

"Tell me, how did the school go to-day? It was your opening, wasn't it?"

The girl stirred a little in her place, and a faint sigh escaped her. She was not looking at him when she spoke:

"Yes, it was the opening. But no one came."

"What?"

She shook her head, still gazing straight before her at the rapidly darkening waters.

"They all promised, but when the time came the children didn't appear. I had everything ready, the little desks and benches. It all looked so cunning. I—I—" she tried to steady her voice, but only succeeded in making it bravely pathetic. "I suppose it doesn't matter. Only I had so set my heart on having it all so nice."

"But,—but I don't understand. What do you mean, they didn't come?" Richard was vainly grasping about for an explanation other than the one he refused to credit.

"It's just that. No one came except Susan Bixby's little Elizabeth. I had to take her home again."

"My God!" ejaculated Richard. And instinctively his fist clenched. If he could only have in his hand now, by the throat, all those pernicious liars who had hurt her so! To promise a poor little girl the means of making her living and then to snatch it away. He must get to the bottom of this. He must know why it was.

"What did they say? What excuse did they give? Did they send you any message?"

"Two of them did during the morning, and two I sent to ask about myself. They said they had changed their minds."

"I see." Richard sat in stupefied silence, trying still not to give admittance to the ugly thought which persisted in trying to enter his mind. And slowly there came over him a great pity for her and a great anger against those others. In spite of the anger, he was very close to tears.

Gloria looked at him for the first time. Her eyes filled at the sight of his pain.

"Oh Richard, don't feel badly! It doesn't matter, really it doesn't."

She tried to smile at him bravely, because she was so touched by his evident concern for her.

"It doesn't matter at all. You see I can do something else. It doesn't have to be a kindergarten."

But Richard was still struggling with that unruly thought which would enter his mind.

"Gloria," he asked, "do you suppose it was on account of me that they did this unspeakably cruel thing?"

She answered lightly, so lightly that he suspected her of trying to conceal her own conviction from him.

"Oh no, I don't think so. It probably would have happened anyway. People are like that, you know. Someone, I suppose, has decided to drop out and not send her child, and a good many people are just so many sheep, you know. It's a pity that it happened to me, that's all. I—I don't think it was anything personal——"

Richard could not look at her. His eyes were full of tears. In spite of worldly counsels to the contrary, in spite of everything, there could be nothing in the world so fundamentally pure, so intrinsically innocent as this wild child heart, and yet, and yet— He was wise enough, sufficiently versed in the trend of the world's opinions to know that his relations with Gloria, were they generally known, would form an objection to her as a teacher of the young, would be, in the eyes of Society, sufficient grounds for this cruelty of these callous people and for the failure of poor little Gloria's pretty schemes. It was unjust, damnably unjust, and yet he knew it to be natural. He realised it now, but he had not before. He had simply thought that people didn't know,—would never find out,—about Gloria and him. The fault was his. He should never have permitted her to put popularity to such a cruel test. It was terrible, the simple little loving heart, the fine proud spirit trampled on like this by those ill-natured swine.

But Gloria would not admit that she was crushed. She talked, somewhat vaguely perhaps, but still she talked of there being other things she might try. She smiled, and even Richard managed to smile a bit to encourage her. He wished that he could take her out to dinner somewhere. He would have liked to show them, the old cats who had hurt her so, how little she and he really cared. But he had promised

Irene to go to dinner with her at Claridge's. It was a largish party and he didn't like to disappoint her.

He realised that in the present situation it was not all beer and skittles for Irene either, so he reluctantly allowed Gloria to go back to her empty rooms, with their vacant kindergarten forms, alone.

"But you'll come to-morrow?"

"Oh yes, I'll come to-morrow." He patted her shoulder.

"And as—as early as you can?" she smiled a little pathetically. "Twenty-four hours is a very long time when you've nothing to do. You won't forget?"

Richard promised to be prompt. It was useless, he knew, to caution her to find other friends besides himself. He had done so often, but she had only smiled and said she wanted no one but himself. And it was the truth. It was lamentable; it ought to be changed, but he felt himself powerless.

He watched her walk away, her brisk alert carriage just a thought weary and drooping; watched her out of sight down the long arcade of branching trees; watched until she had long since passed from view into the dreaming lilac shadows. Then he sat down on the bench she had left empty, his hands clasped in front of him, and stared at the sullen waters of the Thames. But far more bitter were the waters that flooded his soul. The poor little thing! So badly hurt, and so game about it too! The poor little thing, up against the world like this, harried, pushed to the wall. And through whom? For what? Pity, remorse and a terrible fear stared him in the face. A feeling of being confronted by something too strong for him, overpowered him. And there was Irene——



Suddenly Richard started. A man's hand had been laid on his shoulder.

"Cheer up, brother," said an offensively cheerful voice at his side. "Remember a man may be down but he's never out. Jesus Christ is ready and willing to share your load. Put your trust in Him and He will save. To those who try to help themselves He never turns a deaf ear——"

Richard's astonished eyes looked into the sallow pockmarked face of a small shrivelled-up old man wearing the cap of a Salvation Army captain. The man shook him slightly with the hand that was on Richard's shoulder.

"Jesus Christ will save your soul. Let him help you."

A sudden rush of anger surged through Richard. He sprang to his feet, shaking off the man's none too cleanly hand. A fury, an ungovernable rage seized hold on him.

"Get to Hell out of here!" Richard shouted, and then, lest in his anger he should knock the creature down, he turned on his heel and strode rapidly off, without pausing to see if his injunction was obeyed.

He was late. Irene would be waiting. He was sorry, but he could not help it. The experience which he had been through this afternoon had unnerved him. And the colossal impudence of that fellow!

He was halfway home before he realised how utterly wretched he must have looked.

## CHAPTER XXI

### MRS. JOHN SPEAKS HER MIND

AFTER the fiasco of Gloria's kindergarten class, a feeble tremor of sympathy ran through the family.

Only the more sensitive members experienced this; and even they, after the first surprise had worn off, began to think that perhaps she had not tried quite as hard as she might have. It was, of course, absurd to think that the ridiculous affair with Richard (if there really was such a thing, which they very much doubted) —it was absurd to hold that responsible for people going back on their promises in this disgraceful way. There must have been some misunderstanding. Gloria, perhaps, had not followed up her first overtures strenuously enough. She had doubtless assumed too much to be settled which was in reality still very much in the air. She should have made it a point to call personally on each mother, at least a day or so before the opening, instead of trusting to promises made in the summer.

And it was distressing, as Isabel Hartley pointed out, to discover that when she should have been engaged on this very necessary duty, she had instead been walking with Richard on Hampstead Heath, or having tea with him in Rumpelmayer's costly and decorative establishment, and the general opinion of the family was summed up when she remarked that "of course, it was absurd to think people took this affair of Richard and Gloria seriously, but at the same time, if Gloria had

not been thinking so much about Richard, she might have had more time for something more important."

Yet while not given over to the indulgence of sentiment, the Baldwins are essentially clannish. They more or less condemned Gloria among themselves for what had occurred; but there remained the outstanding fact that one of their number had been ill-used by outsiders. And although there was no especial love felt for Gloria as an individual, that tenacity of family feeling which is the prevailing characteristic of their class, drew them into conference as to what was to be done. Gloria, when spoken to on the subject of her ill-fated project, had laughed and said she would try something else. She was a game little thing, so they said to one another, and gameness is a quality much appreciated by the Baldwins. So another effort was made in her behalf.

Tentative suggestions of various sorts were made, but they mainly inclined towards the same end. It was whispered about that perhaps if Mrs. John could be got to take a hand— She had once or twice spoken of employing a secretary. Someone, doubtless Aunt Letty, ventured to suggest that she be spoken to on the subject. Stella was peculiar; it would not do to let her think they were all making plans about her without consulting her. Aunt Hildegarde, therefore, being regarded as the most suitable person, was at length commissioned to act as emissary, or at least to visit Mrs. John and sound her.

From this visit the results were slight. Hildegarde got very little satisfaction for her pains. She reported that Mrs. John was still very undetermined about employing a secretary at all, but admitted that if she did, it might as well be Gloria as anyone. And it was

intimated that Gloria might call to enquire for herself.

To Gloria, her failure in her first endeavour had come more as a surprise than as a crushing blow. There were times when the humiliation did seem terrible to her; but on the other hand, so engrossed was her mind with thoughts of Richard that it was not always possible for her to entertain, with any permanence, ideas on any other subject. There are hearts, not small, indeed so large that they must give all, careless of any return; and of such was Gloria's. When she could think of Richard, the other matter was in truth of little importance to her. Yet the failure had left its mark on her optimism.

Therefore only a sense of duty made her follow the advice given her that she call on Mrs. John. She was not over-anxious for the job. In point of fact she would have preferred almost any other. But as long as so much trouble had been taken about her (Hildegard had emphasised her part in the matter), she felt that she owed it to them at least to make her application. It might be worth trying, at any rate.

So on the Saturday she set out for Regent's Park. She had on a brown frock, the colour of dead autumn leaves, and a little round dark hat, and in deference to Mrs. John's known disapproval of cropped hair, she had tied in her recalcitrant locks under a neat little veil. The costume gave her a more mature appearance than was usual to her.

She rode to her destination, going along the Marylebone Road, on the top of a bus so as to get the air. In spite of a sort of off-hand indifference, she rather dreaded this visit, and found herself wishing that the bus would not go so fast,—almost hoping that something might happen to stop its passage through the

crowded streets. It was not that she held any particular grudge against Mrs. John. She had quite forgotten that little fracas at Aunt Letty's, how many months ago? Yet she shrank from the older woman, instinctively feeling for her one of those inexplicable antagonisms to which violent natures such as Gloria's are frequently liable, even at times towards quite harmless persons. But she had made up her mind to go and go she would.

No friendly catastrophe having impeded the progress of the bus, she was eventually deposited at the proper corner. Gloria climbed down, loth to leave the pleasant bus-top; and trying to stifle her regret that no mistake had been made, or accident met with *en route*, she proceeded without mishap to Cambridge Terrace.

Arrived at the house, she walked up to the door, a resolute little figure.

The house, an old one of a dingy cinnamon-coloured stone, stood back from the street with a little drive of its own up to the cavernous front door. It was a detached house with some pretensions to "grounds," built to resemble a country mansion, with wide balconies and a ponderous roof; but looking, under the grey unsmiling sky, unutterably dreary and depressing.

An elderly housemaid with grey untidy hair and a mouth like a shrivelled plum, opened the door to her. She looked at Gloria distrustfully and showed her into the second best drawing-room.

Gloria was a stranger to her. The woman would not have said that she suspected her of having definite designs on the teaspoons, but she was different from the usual type of which she had had any experience. She looked "foreign"; that was the way the old woman expressed it down-stairs in the kitchen.

Few people came to see Mrs. John. Besides her two sisters-in-law, and perfunctory visits from the brothers and their wives, there were only old Mrs. Drummond from across the Park who came in occasionally of an evening for a game of bezique, or Mr. and Mrs. Pittman, old friends of her mistress from early Paris days. These with a few others completed the list, so there was small wonder that she questioned Gloria's visit and its errand.

While her mistress was dressing, the old woman made it a point to go mousing about in the dining-room, separated from the parlour by heavy dull red curtains partially drawn, where, on one pretext or another, she could keep an eye on the girl.

But, as Tom would have said, she got no change out of the grey-eyed girl who sat so stiffly in her corner of the dingy old room, never raising her eyes from the big maroon-coloured flowers of the ugly Brussels carpet.

Mrs. John rustled into the room. Her spare figure encased in stiff black taffeta, she looked preternaturally small and shrewish as she stared at Gloria with her sharp little black eyes.

"Well," she said abruptly, after she had given the tips of her fingers for a half-second into Gloria's grasp. "Well, what is it? What can I do for you? You want something, I suppose, or you wouldn't be here, seeing you've never been here before."

Gloria felt the brusqueness of the greeting, but it suited her own mood. There was never any beating about the bush with Gloria.

"I came," she said simply, "to see if you would take me on as your secretary. Aunt Hildegard said you wanted one."

"Oh no, I haven't actually said that I wanted one." Mrs. John paused thoughtfully and looked at the girl quizzically with her head on one side. "But it's true I was thinking of it."

She waited and Gloria felt she was expected to say something.

"I—I think I could please you if you'd let me come and try." Then she paused irresolutely, and a sudden revulsion against this sharp-visaged woman standing there with her head impertinently on one side seized her. But she stifled it and waited in meek silence for a reply.

Mrs. John rested one hand on the table beside her. She had not invited Gloria to be seated nor sat down herself.

"You have a knowledge of shorthand, I presume?"

"Oh, but I haven't."

Mrs. John laughed ironically. "What are your qualifications, then?" Her black eyes flashed, and she looked very much amused. Gloria flushed.

"I can use a typewriter fairly well." Gloria spoke slowly.

"Ah." Mrs. John put her head farther over still and again she smiled, a carefully deliberate smile. When she had come down to meet the girl this afternoon, Mrs. John had had something, not very definite, in her mind that she wanted to say. Knowing perfectly well beforehand what was the girl's errand, she had actually considered rather favourably, the idea of employing her. But she was by nature truculent and liked, in a way, to get her money's worth, even in little matters of kindliness.

It would be too much to say that her view was, that if she was to pay Gloria a salary, she felt herself

privileged to insult her first; but there existed in Mrs. John's mind a desire to make the girl just a little afraid of her. She would give her favours grudgingly and if possible, without actually mentioning it, she would like to imply something of her knowledge of that affair with Richard. Perhaps to enhance her own offer by an intimation to Gloria of how difficult it would be for her to overcome that obstacle elsewhere. In short, she would make it appear a charity case. For Mrs. John liked to patronise. All these years, ever since John Baldwin had died and left her rich, she had been making up for lost opportunities. She had meant, therefore, to introduce, as lightly as possible, something of that little matter concerning Richard. But when she found herself face to face with Gloria, something in the steady gaze of the clear young eyes deterred her. She thought most unaccountably of that old time in Paris, and the remembrance maddened her. She had had to look out for herself, God knows! Let this young thing do the like.

"I am afraid," she remarked coldly, "that in that case you may have some difficulty in becoming a secretary."

A sudden flush mounted to Gloria's temples.

"Do you mean that you don't want me?"

Mrs. John had not expected quite so direct an attack. "I haven't said that," she parried, "only I thought we ought to understand one another."

Gloria raised her eyes slowly and studied the older woman's sharp waspish countenance, with its thin acidulous smile.

"I think we do."

"Not so well as we might, however." Mrs. John's voice took on a note of asperity. "I think we ought



to have it understood, first of all, that I'll stand for none of this nonsense with Richard Baldwin."

"What . . . nonsense?"

The girl's face was very white now. Mrs. John should have regarded the pale danger signal, but she did not.

"Hoighty-toighty! Don't pretend you don't know what I mean. You think you can pull the wool over my eyes, I expect. But you are mistaken. I've spent a good many years in this world, you know. And hasn't it occurred to you, besides, that such obtuseness might seriously interfere with your usefulness as a secretary?"

"I am not obtuse," said Gloria stubbornly.

"No?" Mrs. John again smiled her peculiarly sour smile. "Well, we needn't go into that, perhaps. Still, you must admit you might be a bit cleverer. Don't you think it a little impertinent anyway, to try for a post as secretary without even a very definite idea of what a secretary's duties are?"

"But—but I thought that you were willing to have me come to see you," Gloria stammered.

Mrs. John gave a brittle laugh.

"Oh! And I suppose you had it all settled in your mind that you had only to bring your boxes and move in. After you had told me, of course, what wages I was to pay you. Well, since all that remains, apparently, is for you to dictate your terms, let us get that over by all means. What have you to say about it?"

"I don't want to come to you at all," said Gloria suddenly.

Mrs. John rustled her black silk angrily.

"Oh, you don't! Then why are you taking up my time, pray? I am a busy woman, you know. I have

other things to think of than how to provide you with a living. I repeat, if you yourself were occupied otherwise than in running after your cousin, it might not be necessary for your relatives to concern themselves in your affairs."

Gloria had not moved, but her face in the dully lighted room grew a shade paler.

"You have no right to speak to me about . . . that . . ."

"Oh, I've no right, have I? And who are you to tell me what I may do and what I may not? But that is typical. You young people think you can have it all your own way. You've no respect for age or the decent opinions of older people. I daresay you think it none of my business that you should be making a fool of yourself like this."

Gloria drew herself up to her full height of five feet three and for a moment she regarded Mrs. John haughtily. Then she gave her dictum:—

"You're a rude old woman. Because you're rich and because you're old, you've lorded it over people here in your big house until you've lost all sense of humanity. You say I don't respect age, but what is mere age to be respected, unless it is backed at least by dignity? It means nothing but decay. You thought you were going to make me afraid of you, but I'm not. Bah! you're nothing but a frumpy old woman!"

Then, leaving Mrs. John gasping like a fish lately drawn from the water, she turned abruptly and walked, without pausing, down the broad gloomy hall, out of the big front door and straight down the drive.

Her indignation burned her like a flame. Down the drive she fled and along the shady street, her feet rarely touching the ground, like "swift Camilla o'er

the plain," until a fair distance separated her from the ugly brown house and its odious mistress. But little by little the strength of her anger evaporated, the sense of triumph which had upheld her vanished, and in its place there was only the knowledge that once again she had failed in an undertaking.

She had walked the length of Portland Place without a pause, but at the top of Regent Street she stopped before a shop window, regarding the contents indifferently without even being actually aware of what was displayed therein. She was tired and depressed. Then as she turned back to the street there occurred one of those moments, trivial perhaps, yet which to lovers illuminate life,—one of those golden glorious chances which make one suddenly believe in God. She turned, and as she did so, on the instant, a gleam of wan sunlight broke through the dingy grey clouds, lighting the dull street into a semblance of glory. And there at the same instant, directly across the road from her, and looking at her, was Richard!

He waved gaily to her and started to cross.

She stood by the edge of the curb, just on the brink of the sunbeam as it were, her lips slightly parted, her hands involuntarily stretched out in welcome. Mrs. John, the ugly brown house, all the unpleasantnesses and bitter moods of the day rolled away. What did Mrs. John matter? What did anything matter? There was only Richard crossing the street to her, crossing the sunbeam. Nothing else mattered. Nothing else in all the world but the fact that Richard was coming! Richard was coming!

## CHAPTER XXII

### IRENE

IRENE had been at a studio tea at Sharlie's, given in honour of the episodic return from the continent of Jane Longman, Sharlie's companion in the Chelsea studio. Isabel Hartley had been there also (a distinguishing touch of Mayfair at her informal little gatherings always pleased Sharlie. Few of her habitués could boast such a connection). She had offered to drop Irene in Prince's Gate on her way home, but the latter had declined. It was a warm evening and she intended to walk. The air and exercise would do her good. She watched Isabel's motor depart with a grand rush, as if spurning the narrow and unstylish purlieus of Chelsea and anxious to return as speedily as possible to its own proper surroundings; and then set out alone.

But though the evening air was soft and balmy and the way through the gradually darkening streets secluded and soothing, Irene's mood was not of a pattern to match. She was vaguely disturbed and restless. She had heard all about that unfortunate fracas of Gloria's with Mrs. John. They had been talking about it a bit at the studio. Isabel was inclined to be indignant; Sharlie thought it all immensely funny. But the thing somehow saddened Irene. In some subconscious corner of her mind she was almost glad that Gloria had scored off the old woman. And yet she wished that the thing had not occurred. What would Richard think of it? She was doubtful on the subject,

feeling that it would subtly react against herself. Would it not reawaken his sympathy and interest in the girl? She knew that he went there less often of late. Would this affair with Mrs. John bring again into play those emotions which she had hoped time might banish?

She pondered these things as she made her way thoughtfully along the crooked streets, practically deserted at this hour, between Chelsea and Brompton.

Irene was not at any time a very clear thinker, and her thoughts to-night were circling round and round one another like homeless birds seeking some place of shelter. She had almost reached home without having brought her cogitations to any definite conclusion, when suddenly she started and paused in the shadow of a wall.

Someone, apparently the only other occupant of the street, was coming towards her on the opposite side of the way. A man's figure, walking rapidly. Only half seen in the dim light, something familiar in the gait made Irene go suddenly hot and cold all in a moment. She stood motionless, drawn back in the shadow, her body tense and rigid, and waited.

The man,—Richard, it must be he,—was apparently lost in deep thought, oblivious of all outside impressions. No danger that he would notice her; yet Irene crept farther back into the shadows as he neared. Why she did so she could scarcely explain even to herself.

He passed by the place where she was standing, without observing her, without even a glance across the road in her direction. He passed on down the shadowy street, and Irene waited, her fingers tightly gripping the handle of her umbrella, staring after him.

He was moving rapidly. In a few minutes he would be out of sight. The direction in which he was going was away from Prince's Gate, but Chapel Street could be reached that way. . . .

Obeying an uncontrollable impulse, yet in a kind of terror, Irene turned in her tracks and, rapidly retracing her steps, followed the fast-disappearing figure.

At first she was timid, keeping a wide space between him and herself, and momentarily fearing he might look around and discover her; but as the blocks were passed without any sign on his part that he was aware of her presence behind him, and as they appeared to be alone in the street, for no one had yet passed her, her timidity gradually vanished. Keeping an even distance behind him and on the opposite side of the road, and quickening her pace as he did his, she kept her eyes fixed upon his unconscious back, dreading lest a sudden turn or unforeseen interruption should snatch him from her sight. Yet nothing happened.

He walked on, more and more rapidly, so that she could scarcely keep up with him. Her anxiety now became acute. She must keep him in sight; whatever happened she must not lose him now. The importance of her quest assumed gigantic proportions.

He turned a corner unexpectedly, and she broke into a little run. Her heavy limbs protested. But she must not lose sight of him. She was sobbing now, careless if anyone saw. It was as if she and Richard were alone, alone in the night and the darkness, not only alone in the deserted street, but alone in the world, struggling together, and she must fight, fight to keep him hers. And if she lost him to-night, she must inevitably lose in this mad struggle in which they were mutually engaged. The chase took on the character-

istics of a bad dream, a combat with the powers of darkness themselves.

She had rounded the corner where he had turned so rapidly that before she had time to distinguish his figure among the moving shadows, she was all but abreast of him. She was hastening along parallel with him now, trembling in every limb, every nerve stretched taut and terror and despair in her heart.

She was a little ahead of him now. Another moment and she would have dashed across the road to head him off, perhaps to throw herself at his feet. A moment more and her madness would have taken that form, when the man suddenly stopped before a house. The door opened and the light from within fell full upon his face.

The man was not Richard!

Irene found herself shaking. The reaction was too much for her. She leaned up against the wall of a house sobbing. She experienced a moment's faintness.

Presently her self-consciousness returned; she pulled herself together. What a dreadful thing she had done! Like some woman of the streets, tracking her man! And Richard perhaps at home all the time. Alone in the darkness Irene blushed fiery-red. Then seized with a sudden horror of her surroundings she hurried on in the direction of home.

Standing in the little sun-parlour waiting for Richard to come down to dinner, Irene recalled the experience. She went over in her mind the details of that mad pursuit of a strange man through the London streets. And suddenly she understood the depth of her feelings.

But what a dreadful thing to do? Suppose Richard should ever find out? Irene, the embodiment of convention, stood appalled at her own indiscretion.

But, seated opposite Richard at table, something of the same stubborn resolve to keep him hers permeated her. I won't, I won't give him up! her mind was saying. She began to feel now that she had never before realised how deep was her love for her husband. She would bring him back to her. In spite of the whole world, she would bring him back to her!

The resolution of an habitually weak woman is one of the strongest things on earth. Half-timidly, Irene put forth her strength. She felt within herself an unguessed power rising, like a lazy giant, waking and stretching itself. With this aid she would conquer.

She called to mind certain passages in their early married life. She had not been so much in love as Richard when they married. But her emotions, slow to formulate, were deep and strong. To-day she was a woman filled to the utmost with love, sensuous, replete.

And Richard began to study her. Subconsciously he marvelled, but did not comprehend the change in her. Only he sensed vaguely that in some intangible way she was different now from the woman he had married fourteen years before. He was scarcely astute enough to be able to put his finger on the actual crux of the matter. In recalling their life together, as he did at this time, he remembered that it had seemed to him at first that he had wearied her with his love. Was it that he had never given her as much as she desired? Dimly he perceived the hand of the little girl Gloria in the matter. Had it needed this to awaken her? She was slow to love, deep and passionate of nature. And Richard was very human.

But there was Gloria, with the light of young love in her eyes. And the little line of perplexity between Richard's brows began to deepen day by day.



## CHAPTER XXIII

### RICHARD

RICHARD at this time went through a special purgatory of his own. He was not a base man. Of all the Baldwins he was perhaps the most tender-hearted. To cause suffering to anything was grievous to him, yet Life had put him in a position where he must needs make suffer one or both of those who were dearest on earth to him. It was as if Fate, disregarding all natural laws, had swept down upon him, crushing and stamping his soul into obedience to things repellent to him.

For secrecy and all things underhand were far from being a part of his nature. Men said of him that he was upright. He was aware of this, and it came to him with shame that their judgment was no longer true. He had but bowed his head before the advance of the Mighty One who

“ . . . comest to bend the pride  
Of the hearts of God and man,  
Cypris;—”

Yet this was the result! Life was cruel to him. And the time had come when he knew that he must choose his course.

Irene asked no questions, but her eyes told him daily what in his heart he already knew. And Gloria stood between them, growing more helpless, more dependent upon him every day. What could the end be? Life could not go on like this.

He must choose between the two. This thought,

like a refrain, recurred to him again and again. It beat ever in his ears like the sound of the sea. For three days Richard fought against it, trying to shut the idea out from his mind. And on the third day he made a decision.

"I am going down to Rydnor," he told Irene at the breakfast table.

"Rydnor!" she ejaculated; and involuntarily a slight shiver shook her.

"Yes," said Richard. "I'll be back to-morrow by the late train, I hope."

And that was all that was said about it.

Richard ran down to the office for a few minutes but came back early to pack his bag. This he always did for himself, preferring to see for himself that all the things he wanted were in place, rather than to trust others. Irene could see through the open door into the dressing-room where Richard was busy. She watched him going back and forth from closet to drawer.

Irene's lips were tight together in a hard line; but when Richard once or twice stepped into the room to ask some question or to venture a commonplace remark, she managed to curve them into a smile for his benefit and to stitch industriously upon the bit of sewing which she laid down again the moment his back was turned.

The fact was, she wanted desperately to know why he was going. An uneasy suspicion filled her with dread. Yet she should have asked him, had she meant to do so, when he first mentioned his purpose. To do so now would sound prying. But Richard, gazing abstractedly at the tapering white fingers flying among the folds of linen, never guessed that she was anything

but calm in her mind, or that a doubt more terrible than the Spartan boy's fox was gnawing within her.

When he was at length ready, Irene put down her sewing. "I'll drive to the station with you."

The journey was made almost in complete silence. Arrived at the station, Irene did not alight from the carriage. She said good-bye to him in the brougham and he watched her drive off before seeking his train. Richard sighed his relief when she was gone. He was glad she had not asked for an explanation of his going. Even had she done so he would have been hard pressed to answer her, for his motives were none too clear even to his own mind.

Irene, meanwhile, had driven northwards with the intention of calling on Isabel Hartley in Hill Street. But at Hyde Park Corner she changed her mind.

"Drive to No. 25 Chapel Street, Brompton," she directed the coachman. And after she had done so, she pressed her hands tightly together to keep back the attack of nerves which threatened her when she did anything wild like this.

Arrived in Chapel Street, Irene asked for Miss Baldwin and was shown upstairs to Gloria's tiny parlour. Not only was Gloria at home, but in neither of the rooms was there the slightest evidence of any preparation for departure. The door being open into Gloria's bed-room, Irene could see in there as well, and the girl's things were all quite as usual.

The doubts which had been haunting Irene since early morning when Richard had told her he was going away, fled precipitately. Gloria at any rate was not going with him.

"I suppose you think it's quite time I came to see you," she began. "I've meant to come before but so

many things have come up to prevent me. Last week there was that big Charity Fête. It was a great success, you know. Did you hear about it? The Prince came. It was a huge success."

She rattled on with her excuses. Her relief at finding Gloria still in London made her light-headed. She did not realise how wildly she was talking, how different she was from her natural self, until she found Gloria looking at her. Then she became, all at once, abnormally grave and self-composed.

As soon as she could gracefully do so, she made her adieus and departed. The visit had been awkward, had offended her sense of delicacy, yet the relief she felt from having gone was recompense enough for her.

And Richard went down to Rydnor.

The sky which had been lightly flecked with clouds when he left London, was overcast by the time he reached the little fishing-village near which they had all stayed during the summer. Leaving his fly at the gate of the small cottage farm, Richard walked up to the door and knocked. His request met with acquiescence.

Yes, the landlady could put him up for the night. Oh, but she remembered him very well! And how was his dear good wife? And the young lady?

And was it for only one night that he wanted the room? Yes, of course, she could put him up,—that was if he didn't mind having the room the young lady had occupied last summer. She couldn't give him his old room back because that one was already let. She had been quite fortunate to find a permanent lodger at this season of the year. A college professor who was writing a book and wished to be quiet had come down and taken the upstairs room which Mrs.

Baldwin had liked so much. Yes, the one with the dormer windows.

But the other was vacant. It was quite at his disposal. And what might be bringing Mr. Baldwin down to Rydnor at this time?

Richard mumbled an answer to her voluble questions, sent his bag to the room back of the parlour and, declining a cup of tea, struck out directly for the sea. The landlady's questions had made him wonder at himself. What indeed *had* brought him back here?

Close to the water's edge, Richard paused and looked out over the waves. Near at hand the sea was grey, leaden-coloured, but far out the sunlight still touched a narrow line of water to a sparkling blue and silver. Light and elusive, it floated there on the horizon, like some far-away realm of content beyond mortal visioning.

For a little while Richard walked up and down the beach. He was passing in rapid review the outstanding events of his life. The years at home with the mother he adored and the father whom he respected but could not like; school days with their fresh boyish enthusiasms, the fast-crowding tumultuous experiences of youth.

And as love had been the pervading motive which had brought him down here, so it coloured all his recollections. He reviewed his first half-serious attempts at passion. He had not loved as many men do, here and there indiscriminately, but there had been certain adventures which, as a college man, he had pursued more or less in the light of education. These experiences, entered into more as a matter of principle than through desire, he recalled as being distasteful in actuality but pleasant in retrospect. But fundamen-

tally they meant nothing to him. The one great love in his life had been Irene.

He had met her at a tennis party on the banks of the Thames. He was exactly twenty-four and she a year or so younger. Three years later they had been married. They had taken their place in society; in all little details they were a distinctly modern couple, not given to over-demonstrativeness. They went their individual ways. Yet in all the fourteen years during which they had been husband and wife, he had never cared for another woman. He was attractive, women liked him, yet it was never whispered of him as of so many, that So-and-so had lost her heart to him, or that this one or that one was making Irene jealous. Looking back at it now, Richard was amazed at his own coldness.

And then Gloria had come.

Why had he succumbed? What rare charm had this pale slip of a girl for him,—for him who was so untouched by others? He had been so unsuspecting of himself, so cocksure of his fidelity to Irene. Was it that his arrogance must be punished? Had he been at heart a Pharisee scorning other men's weaknesses, not doubting his own strength? Was this the payment exacted of him?

And Gloria, what of her? Some men, perhaps, would have let matters go on as they were; but this Richard could not do. It was imperative to him that some decision should be reached. Impossible for him to go on day by day living as he had been doing. He must make a decision,—not as to conduct, but of the mind. He must choose between them.

But first of all he must walk off this terrible depression. He turned back from the sea towards the downs.

He scarcely noticed that the ocean had darkened to a dull charcoal-grey beneath the lowering bank of cloud. A faint flash of lightning and dull roll of thunder greeted him as he walked deliberately into the heart of the storm.

The rain beat down upon his unprotected head. But Richard heeded it not. Why must he be put in this situation? Why had God done this thing to him? He had been a good man, a dutiful son, a loving husband, upright and courageous in all his dealings with his fellowmen. Yet God had cursed him with love of two women, the God whom he had served.

And at the word his anger rose.

The rain had increased in volume. It was coming down in torrents. Lightnings flashed across the sky and mutter upon mutter of thunder rolled across the expanse of the downs. Richard had thrown aside his cap. He walked with the raindrops beating down upon his hair.

Back and forth in grotesque zig-zags he tramped. A hill rose presently before him in the midst of the plain and he climbed it. So far as he could see on all sides of him there was not a vestige of human life anywhere visible.

The crashing thunder increased in violence; the lightning was now almost without intermission. And Richard, with his head thrown back, struggled with the storm and fought a like battle in his soul.

Strange words came stumbling through his lips, muttered execrations and a weird sort of triumph. There was a grim humour in the thing—that he, Richard Baldwin, should be in such a pass! Words of a sermon he had once heard came back to him. "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth,"—that had

been the text. "It was blessed," the clergyman had said, "to suffer. For these were the elect of God." Blessed! Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth! "Well, you've done your worst!" So cried Richard and shook his fist at the pouring heavens. "You've done your worst. And so you can't do anything more to me."

And at the booming of the thunder and the fierce brilliance of the lightning Richard threw back his head and laughed;—laughed at the rage of the elements, at the life he had led with its trumpery ideals, at the smirking myth of a just God! Then onward again with the storm in his face.

Suddenly the rain ceased,—as suddenly as it had begun. The lightning faded in little flickering streaks; the thunder died away along the sea. And, with the sudden calm, Richard's mocking mood left him. He paused to gaze about him; then lying down in the wet grasses with his head between his hands, he drew in deep breaths of the sweet moisture-laden air, as if drawing up from the bosom of Mother Earth new strength, new help to carry on his burden.

A half-hour later he rose and went slowly down the hill and back towards the farmhouse. He saw the dunes dumbly yearning towards the sea, veiled in a silver mist; and on the beach a single solitary figure, an old woman in a blue shawl gathering sticks that had been cast up by the storm. He watched her moving like some remote dream-figure until she had passed out of sight around the curve of the shore. Below the cliff the darkling waters foamed and swirled in cruel eddies, as though a dream had just gone *down*.



And he knew that henceforth Gloria would only be to him a piteous little ghost. "No backward path; ah! no returning!" It was as if the long leagues of sea had rolled between them.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### IN WHICH PETER TAKES A HAND

IN his big square house in Lowndes Square, Peter Baldwin had come to a decision.

He had dined with Simeon the night before at the club in Piccadilly, to which they both belonged, and there Simeon had told him about Nathan's granddaughter and the way she was behaving of late with their nephew Richard. Peter had heard something of the matter before from Sarah, but had laid it to jealousy and the foolish clack-clack of women. It was not until Simeon had told him how really serious the matter was, that Peter had been at all roused.

Simeon had said something ought to be done. He had reminded Peter that he was the girl's guardian. And of course Simeon was right; it was plain that something ought to be done. Still Peter didn't see what he could do.

He'd tried to do his share, Peter had. After Nathan's death he had asked her there. He had said "come to see us." She hadn't come. That gay dog Tom appeared to see her now and then. But that wouldn't do a girl any good. Simeon said he'd spoken to her. Peter didn't see what more he could do. If a girl was bound to be bad, had it bred in the bone, too, as this one had, what the devil could he or anyone do?

Richard, they said, was trying to behave himself. Had come to see the folly of the thing, in short; but the girl, it appeared, wouldn't let him go. She cer-

tainly was a sticker. Tom had said she followed him around like a tame cat. Disgusting! Peter thought less well of her than he had. Not so pretty either as he had at first thought her. A pert little thing. And rather like Nathan in her obstinacy. Couldn't get what she wanted and yet hadn't the guts to give it up! There was Nathan with that Spanish dancer of his. He'd forgotten her at last, but it had taken years to accomplish. They were lacking in pride, that crew!

He left Simeon and went home to Sarah, who had been able to tell him more details of that now famous interview of Gloria's with Mrs. John. Sarah recounted with much giggling and tossing of her frizzed head just what it was that Gloria had said.

"A decayed old woman!" Wasn't it too delicious? But how had she *dared*! It was quite evident now, that she, Gloria, didn't care what happened.

What Sarah told him confirmed Peter in the resolve which he made just before closing his eyes, that on the morrow he would go to see for himself what he could make out of this wretched affair. What the girl had said to Mrs. John rather pleased him. He was glad that the old woman (Peter mentally used a very coarse expression) had got as good as she gave. In spite of a kind of grudging admiration, he had never been fond of his sister-in-law. And as well as any man he enjoyed a good fight. Yes, on the morrow he would go to see for himself.

Gloria sat alone in her little room at the back of the house in Chapel Street. From her place by the window where she sat with folded hands, she could hear the little slavey singing down below as she hung out the clothes in the back garden, and the occasional choking of the geyser bath next door.

Some one across the yard in the house at the back was practising scales on a rackety piano. The person, whoever it was, played the G scale with the F sharp left out. The windows were open so that the sound penetrated Gloria's room and would not be shut out. Over and over it went, one, two, three, a false one—and so on.

Gloria had a headache. The incessant piano-practice disturbed her and the steady glub-glub of the geyser. Yet it seemed absurd that she should be troubled by such things now. For she had other more deeply disturbing matters to think about. Life was turning out to be quite different from what she had expected.

She had noticed a subtle change in Richard. It was what she had subconsciously dreaded ever since that fateful widening of the space between them in the lodging-house room at Rydnor. But she had not believed it until now. She was frightened. She saw herself suddenly facing life wide-eyed with terror. And she could do nothing to combat it. So she sat idle in her room.

It was so that Peter found her, when the slatternly maid had shown him up the long canvas-covered flight of steps.

Gloria started when she saw who was her visitor; but with a composure which Peter could not but admire, she offered him a chair and seated herself opposite him, squarely in the light. She was not an adept at concealment certainly. Peter shifted his large feet and looked about him critically.

"Not much of a place you've got here. A bit cramped, isn't it? How much do you pay for a place like this, now?"

"Oh, no; it's quite large enough for me. I'm not very big myself, you know." Gloria ignored the last question, and Peter forebore to press it.

He waited a moment, thinking she might answer, but as she gave no indication of doing so, he spoke again.

"Dirty looking maid that was, showed me up. I don't suppose you get much service in a place like this."

"Oh, enough. I haven't many wants." Gloria's tone was as light as birds on the wing. Peter looked at her more sharply.

She sat up very straight and looked him in the face. There was something peculiarly penetrating in her gaze. To cover the embarrassment this simple fact caused him, Peter began to hem and haw in his throat. It was a favourite way with him of summoning up courage.

"You're not looking well," he remarked.

Gloria gave a slight shrug. She did not reply to this conversational venture at all, and Peter saw that he must proceed himself.

"Yes, you're thin. You've been moping too much. You're too much by yourself. Why don't you go out and enjoy yourself more? Why don't you come to see us?"

The ghost of a smile fluttered across the girl's lips and then died again.

"It isn't right for a young person to sit cooped up in a little box of a room like this, all day."

"Oh, I go out."

"You ought to have some friends," continued Peter.

"Yes," said Gloria, "I ought."

Her eyes looked very wide and dark, but her expression had not changed at all. She looked steadily at

Peter and her eyes, had he known how to read them, said, "how much more of this torture are you going to give me?"

But Peter was not versed in the intricacies of a woman's soul. He could not read her expression. He only knew that she looked "queer." He shifted his feet uneasily. There was something eerie about her. But she looked very meek. It seemed incredible that she could ever have given Mrs. John "what for" in the way they said she had. She wasn't at all like that to-day. Only there was something—Peter wasn't exactly afraid of her, yet he felt vaguely uncomfortable in her presence. As he told Sarah afterward, he hadn't liked the look of her. And the fact irritated him. Peter was not used to being cowed by either physical or psychic methods.

"Tell me," he said abruptly, "what's all this we've been hearing about you and Richard?"

A look of sudden understanding betrayed her instant comprehension of why he had come, and the faintest of smiles curved her lips. She gave him a quaint look. "You, too?" it seemed to say. The sight of it exasperated Peter. He began to bluster:

"A pretty scandal you've been giving us! What d'ye mean by it anyway? Philandering about with a man old enough to be your father! And your cousin besides. 'Tisn't done, y'know. It hasn't surprised me so much. I'm too old a soldier to be surprised at anything. And I'm not easily shocked."

"No?"

"But if you're going to have an affair of this kind, it ought to be kept outside the family."

"Of course."

"There's no need of giving the whole town something to laugh at."

"That's true."

Peter paused and looked at her sharply. Was she making fun of him? But the tense muscles of her hands clasped in her lap gave the lie to this interpretation. Again Peter cleared his throat.

"Well, I don't know," said Peter impatiently, "I don't know what you want to upset us all in this way for. I'm sure we've all tried to do our best for you. There was Nathan, he gave up his life to looking after you. And Simeon, he's given you good advice, hasn't he? He told me he'd spoken to you."

An image of Simeon in their last interview rose before Gloria's eyes. Simeon trying to dissect this love of hers for Richard, which they were all so far from understanding. She saw him watching her with pendant cheeks and cold grey eyes; eyes that gleamed at her from between their heavy lids like a cat's eyes watching a mouse. Advice! yes, perhaps you would call it that. And instinctively she nerved herself for this new attack. It was all the time now as if she were waiting for, and warding off, a blow in the back. But Peter, watching her, thought that she must be convinced.

"Well now, are you going to stop it, all this nonsense?"

"What do you mean, stop it?"

"I mean are you going to give it up? Are you going to behave yourself like a decent gentlewoman? Are you going to stop this running around after Richard,—after your cousin? In short, are you going to give Richard up?"

She looked him fairly in the eye and shook her head.

"No," she said, "I'm not."

Peter was dumfounded. He rose to his feet. "Well!" he said. "I've got no more to say. If you want to go on as you've been doing, I wash my hands of the whole affair. I've tried to help you. But there it is. You don't seem to even want help."

"No, I don't," she said. She did not look at him.

"Very well, if you're bound to be so obstinate, I can't help it. You think you're in love, I suppose. Fiddlesticks! But there it is, I can't do anything with you. But I can tell you, you won't like it when Richard throws *you* over, as he will, you mark my words! Well, I'm through!"

Peter went down the stairs grumbling to himself, his powerful form making the banisters shake at every step. He was angry at Gloria and at himself. But that came of trying to help people! Damned if he'd ever try it again. She could go to the devil for all of him,—that obstinate, pig-headed little brat! He'd done his best; he didn't care what happened to her now. Only she needn't come to him for sympathy when she reached the end of the rope!

After he was gone, Gloria stood for a few minutes in the centre of the room where he had left her. Then she walked over to the window. The view from the little square casement seemed strange, the walls and dingy gardens brought from some other part of London. Why was it like this?

And suddenly she put her two hands to her forehead.

"Oh, Christ!" she said softly, "I can't stand it! I can't stand it!"



## CHAPTER XXV

### IN WHICH GLORIA SEEKS

EVER since Peter's visit, and the state of affairs which it evidenced, Gloria had spent her days in a restless fever of idleness. It seemed to her a bitter thing that she should not be with Richard more frequently. He had dropped off noticeably in his visits to her. He came but seldom and then stayed only a few minutes. It all made her very unhappy. She realised that she possessed no great power of attraction, and she became suddenly resentful of the fact. If there were only other men, she thought he might come back to her; but Fate had cast her lot where there were no men or very few, and these did not interest her. There was Tom, of course, but what woman in her senses could look at Tom after Richard? And yet if there were only some way to waken in him again that throbbing passion she had known before.

Richard had said that their meetings must be accidental, and Gloria had bowed her head in obedience. But London is too big a place for accidents like that to happen very often. She could count on the fingers of one hand the number of times that she had run into Richard solely by accident. It was silly to wait for chance to throw him in her way. She must help chance along, that was all.

It had been four days now since she had seen him, four intolerable days. As she sat brooding on the fact and wondering how she could check the gradually

increasing separation between them, she suddenly remembered that Aunt Letty had said she expected Irene there for tea that afternoon. Gloria was not fond of the aunts' society, but there was just a possibility that Richard might accompany his wife. It was a small chance, but she had nothing else to do and it was worth trying. She would go!

She sprang to her feet, jamming on her hat over her curling bobbed hair. As she slipped into the sun-bathed street, her heart beat with a strange excitement. She was sure now that Richard would be there. A certainty, born of instinct rather than of reason, whispered encouragement to her as she sped along the pavements.

Once she had decided to go, it seemed as if she couldn't reach the place fast enough. She saw little or nothing of the passing traffic. The conviction that Richard would be at Gloucester Terrace when she arrived, urged her on unhesitatingly and grew with each yard she traversed. At the street corners she literally ran, so eager was she to reach his side.

And after all when she arrived at Gloucester Terrace Richard was not there. She felt the cold chill of disappointment even before she opened the drawing-room door. It turned her sick, setting her trembling as if with an ague. With a tugging at her heart, and a sense of wasted futile effort, she walked slowly into the room.

There they sat, Letty and Hildegard and Mrs. Matthew, and in the corner, talking with old Mrs. Wallace, Irene. But Richard was not there.

Gloria greeted them all casually and dropped into a chair, feeling physically tired, as if she had been running for miles. Mrs. Wallace was talking in a

sing-song voice. She went on just where she had left off on Gloria's entrance, as if there had never been any interruption.

"—And they have enlarged the main room of the Parish House, downstairs, you know, where the big boys have their Sunday school classes. You remember there was a door just before you entered the stair hall? Well, that one's been bricked up and a new one made at the right about ten feet,—no, I should say a little more,—perhaps fifteen feet away. In those big rooms you can never be sure of any exact distance, but I should say somewhere between fifteen and ten feet from the old one,—to the left. Did I say to the right before? No, it's the left. Well, of course it depends on how you enter, which hand it's on. If you come in from the side door, you know,—that's the one I used when I first took Bernadotte there. I can remember it so well! He was dressed in a little white sailor suit. And he cried so I didn't dare leave him, and was obliged to stay to the very end. It quite upset the teacher, I remember. But Bernadotte was always so sensitive—" Her words trickled on with the even flow of a tap which has been opened and left running.

Gloria felt irritated. Irene's calm annoyed her almost as much as Mrs. Wallace's garrulity. She began to fidget. And underneath it all was a dull resentment against these people who could chatter on about things which did not matter. She had a child's impatience against them all, a feeling that they should help her to see Richard, not try to prevent her being with him. Irene might tell her where he was——

She hated them all, especially the aunts. She looked at Mrs. Wallace's black bonnet and hated that, too. She hated everything! She was out of sorts and

at odds with the whole universe. Nothing was right, nothing as it should be,—it was all beastly, beastly——

And then all at once the door opened and Richard was there. It was as if the room had suddenly split across, letting in sunlight and warmth in place of the cold monotony of stuffed furniture and dull grey hangings. There crept around her comfort and peace, and rest so perfect that a little sigh fluttered from her breast.

Richard gave them all a laughing story of an encounter he had had with a visiting rustic who was enquiring about the sights of the city. He spoke to Gloria very kindly. He was in a good humour. And as for Gloria, she was quite content to sit back in her corner and watch Richard. She devoured him with her eyes. The sight of him satisfied her as a hungry man is appeased with food. Richard was indeed food and drink to her.

But she was impatient when anyone else talked. It seemed to her that Mrs. Wallace would never get through with her endless explanations of how badly the new housemaid had behaved, in what an ungrateful way she had let Bernadotte's eggs get cold at breakfast when he was only a few minutes late in coming down, and how she had finally been obliged to speak to her upon the subject.

It was all very dull, yet no one else seemed to mind it particularly. But through it all Richard sat there; and they were wasting time,—wasting time. She wanted to rush over to his side. Why should other people sit between them? Other people who didn't care! If she could have followed her own inclinations, she would have gone over to his side then and there. And Mrs. Wallace drivelled on! It was exasperating,

intolerable— Gloria gave an impatient little shake.

"Richard," she said suddenly, and as if by concerted action they all paused to listen to her. "Richard, I want to go for a walk. Will you take me?"

Richard hesitated, and there was an awkward pause. The aunts looked at one another and then at Irene. Hildegard raised her eyebrows significantly towards Mrs. Matthew. Irene coloured furiously, and was angry with herself. It was ridiculous, why should she blush! But the request was so sudden, so abrupt, and considering the fact that Richard was calling on the aunts, so rude, that she felt embarrassed.

Richard smiled faintly and stood up. "All right, we'll go. Get your coat." He turned with a smile and half apology to Aunt Letty: "Gloria is a keen little walker!" and again to Gloria: "Are you ready? Shall we say good-bye, then?"

Gloria was very pale. The others watched them go in silence.

"Gloria seems very restless," observed Mrs. Matthew to those remaining, as the door closed behind them.

Once they were outside, Gloria tried to explain her abrupt request. "I couldn't stand Aunt Hildegard staring at me any longer. And they asked me so many rude questions about my new rooms. And that awful Mrs. Wallace, talking and talking and talking, about nothing at all. It was all so odious!"

But Richard did not appear to consider this sufficient excuse for her conduct. He did not actually rebuke her, but he was gloomily taciturn, not commenting upon the recent scene at Aunt Letty's. His good nature appeared to have vanished. They walked in silence through the dismal streets, where, but a few

minutes before, Gloria had pictured herself moving, Richard beside her, with singing steps.

Half-timidly she took Richard's arm. He did not repulse her, and the contact helped her somehow.

"Where shall we go?" he asked.

"Let's turn into the park." It seemed to her lighter and roomier there, and she felt the need of light and space. The narrow streets seemed to choke her. It might help to go see if there were any children sailing their boats in the Round Pond. So they turned their steps thither.

But when they reached it, the Round Pond was, for some mysterious reason, quite unusually deserted. The sun was no longer shining; it was a morbid sort of day and few people were in the park. Yet when they had circled the Gardens and finally reached her own door again, Gloria felt a little calmer. Just being with Richard had soothed her in spite of everything. But it was hard to say good-bye. And there was the long evening stretching ahead of her. And endless long evenings after that. She felt that Richard might have asked her home to dinner.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### IN WHICH GLORIA FINDS

GLORIA found the chances of an accidental meeting with Richard very few, and now that he had virtually ceased to come to see her in Chapel Street, she had entered upon a determined scheme to cheat chance into giving her the advantage whenever she could. She went constantly wherever she thought Richard might be, and haunted the spots where, having once met him, there existed a possibility that she might meet him again.

For instance, she went to the aunts' house whenever she thought there was the least chance of his being there. But Richard was not a very frequent visitor in Gloucester Terrace, and it was awkward making her excuses to leave when she found she had been mistaken in supposing him to be there. This happened a number of times. Aunt Letty complained, "You're like a fly when you come here. You just settle for a moment and then you're off again."

And that was the truth. If she did not find Richard in any place where she went seeking him, she must be off again in search of him, driven forth into the sunny streets, or rainy by-ways, by an intolerable longing,—out walking up and down in the places he most frequented, anywhere,—everywhere where there was the least chance of meeting him.

Once she went three times to Gloucester Terrace in the same day, because she had heard, through sub-

terranean channels, that Aunt Letty expected guests to luncheon, and later that Hildegarde had asked some one in to tea to meet Irene. And after all only Irene had been there.

Upon this occasion Hildegarde Baldwin became indignant. Gloria's little manœuvres, so pitiaibly child-like, so transparent, might have touched a less rigidly correct person than Hildegarde. The latter, however, was far from feeling any sympathy for the love-torn child.

"If she does it again," Hildegarde declared viciously to Letty and Sarah, "I shall give her a piece of my mind! It is positively disgusting! I did think a Baldwin would have better taste."

Whether Gloria guessed her antipathy, or whether the chances of finding Richard there appeared too remote for her to pursue longer, Gloria, for a time, ceased her visits to the old ladies.

But she did not give up her search. All day long, up and down the soulless streets she plodded, her little feet aching with the miles she traversed in a wistful hope. Like a little dog that has lost its master, she ran hither and yon in a search usually vain, and passed, a patient wilful little figure, unnoted in the throng.

She often wore a little blue cape. It could be seen fluttering at many strange corners, in Cheapside, in the Poultry and Crown Office Row, wherever there was the least hope of meeting her lover, anywhere where she had heard of his going.

That year the season died in a flush of autumn glory more radiant than any remembered. The flaunting leaves fired in reds and golds fell slowly, languorously, as if loath to leave their gorgeous companions. Day followed day of mellow golden sunlight; a golden still-



ness in the air and the waters of the river golden, too, like a Midas flood skirting the city.

Yet to Gloria London appeared to be all long empty streets, without beauty and without charm. Sometimes she used to walk slowly along the streets in the West End, listening to the sibilance of leaves beneath her feet or watching the sparrows squabbling noisily in the gutters, but always alone,—always longing.

And the parks, how wonderful they would be if only Richard were here beside her! But without him all was empty, colourless, void. There were times when she almost forgot, when some lost ghost of childhood came back, driving Richard for a moment from his throne in her heart, to haunt her with a memory or to tease her with unexpressed desires. It was the slow change from childhood to womanhood, when the difficult knowledge comes that one must exchange the living of dreams for the mere dreaming of them. For Gloria a time of lost illusions and disappointed hopes.

She fought stubbornly against this knowledge which she didn't, she couldn't, understand. It did not occur to her to pity herself. She was only always questioning, seeking some explanation for the sadness of her lot, or some cure for the grievous situation.

She had no complaint against Irene. Gloria was just by nature and Irene had had him first. He belonged to Irene. That he should forsake Irene for herself had never entered Gloria's thoughts. That was what made it all seem so cruel to her. She wanted so little, so pitifully little. And Irene had so much, compared with herself.

On a warm night in late October, Richard, walking morosely silent beneath the trees in the square, was

aware of an inward disquietude struggling with and disturbing the perfect harmony of the autumn night.

He heard the trees above his head brushing their half-bare branches against one another in the mournful breeze. There was something uncanny in the sound, something eerily premonitory. To shake off the sense of desolation that the chill evening air threw over him, Richard left the precincts of the square and walking rapidly eastward, turned into the park at the Albert Gate.

Here he wandered up and down for some time. It was cool here, but there was not the eerie chill that he had experienced a little while since. He would have enjoyed his constitutional, but the lovers in the park troubled him. They sat everywhere, silent on the benches, enrapt, satiated, like mummies encased in cerements of mawkish love, ridiculous and yet at the same time each of them intensely serious.

Richard tried not to notice them, to give them as little heed as they apparently gave him, as with bent head, he slowly promenaded past their half-hidden trysting places. Whispered words came to him from time to time; and once a sudden gust of wild laughter brought him up starting. A little tragedy was enacted not far from where he stood. A woman, young, to judge by her voice, caught out by a half crazed husband, as she nestled on a bench close in the arms of her lover. Richard could hear her hysterical laughter, as after the fracas had ceased, she was led away by the irate partner of her life. The whole thing turned Richard rather sick. It was disgusting really, when you thought of it, so much sex raging unchecked here in the lonely darkness. He wondered why he remained within sight and sound of what was so odious to him;

yet he did remain, presently resuming his slow walk up and down, his eyes on the gravel path at his feet.

A hand was suddenly laid on his arm, lightly, half timidly, and turning he saw Gloria standing beside him, her little blue cape fluttering loosely in the wind. For a moment he was startled, for he had not expected to see her to-night. The dusky light made her appear somehow ethereal and unreal, like a figure seen sometimes in dreams.

Richard regarded her in silence and she looked up at him enquiringly, with a half shrinking, as if waiting to hear her fate spoken.

A great grief smote Richard's heart. He hated to have her out alone at night like this, following him as she must have been doing to track him here, a place so out of the way of his usual haunts. She must have been waiting, watching and following until at last she dared address him. He looked at her sadly.

"Why are you here?" he asked.

She nestled her head against his arm, which she had taken in both of hers. Drawn up close to him like a kitten rubbing up against its master, she whispered her answer:

"I wanted to be with you for a little while."

"But it's late. You shouldn't be here alone."

"I'm not alone now." Again that soft nestling of her body against him.

"But I can't stay with you," Richard protested. "I must be going almost immediately."

He saw her face fall even in the dim light. Her body drooped suddenly like a plant lacking water.

"Stay just a little while," she whispered. "I—I—it's so awfully lonely at home."

"But this surely isn't much, seeing me for only a

few minutes like this. Why should you come out for this?"

"It's better than sitting at home all alone, however short it is." She was stubbornly clinging to her hope of a reprieve from his words. She took his hand and pressed it to her breast, kissing the curled fist tenderly.

Richard looked up. A single star gleamed down at them from the heavens like the eye of a watcher.

"Come," he said abruptly, "I shall take you home."

Her under-lip protruded ever so slightly in the faintest of pouts, but she turned obediently. Almost in silence they made their way to the gate. Once a voice blared at them, lewd, menacing, but they paid no attention. On into the dim familiar streets where the sick lamps glimmered, threading their way slowly, silently to Gloria's door.

And at the door they paused. Gloria looked up at the darkened house with a little shiver. "Won't you come in for a little while?" It was half-mechanical, the request, so sure was she of being refused. It was long since Richard had been there. Yet she asked him as one fears to let any chance slip. And to her surprise Richard said: "Yes, I'll come in."

Gloria almost swooned with happiness. She went dizzily up the stairs ahead of Richard, scarcely daring even yet to believe her good fortune.

And while the golden gleaming moon climbed over the housetops, Gloria was happy. When at last he left her, Richard drew her to him.

"I'm so glad, I'm so glad!" she whispered.

And as he went down the creaking stairs, as quietly as possible so as not to disturb the householders, he could hear her singing softly to herself up above. And

although he told himself that once again he had been a fool, and would regret his action in the morning, in some inscrutable way Richard too was glad,—glad that he had come.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### IN WHICH GLORIA WAIT.

THE day had been a particularly trying one. There did not seem to be any luck or goodness in the world. Gloria, wandering dispiritedly through the bustling streets, caught no reassuring glimpse of Richard, however much she searched with eyes grown sick with unappeased hopes.

Once indeed, she had thought she had seen him. A man swinging down the Strand ahead of her on the opposite side. He had the same height and gait as Richard.

She ran across the street, her heart knocking fiercely at her side, her mind a delirious mixture of joy and fearfulness. Her mouth felt dry and her throat refused to swallow. She ran across the street, caught up with the man and looked him in the face. It was not Richard.

Discouraged, she dropped back once more and continued her fruitless journey. Not since that night, now several weeks back, when he had come home with her to Chapel Street, had she so much as caught a glimpse of him. But now the wild hope born of that momentary certainty that the man ahead of her was Richard had unsettled her. Her nervousness redoubled, and gradually the desire grew upon her,—not only the desire but the necessity of finding him.

She fought against the suggestion of her overwrought brain, but the idea once formed became too

powerful for her. She would go to find him, even there at his office. He must surely be there at least. He could not have vanished from the face of the earth.

The pavements were hot under her feet. She seemed driven along by some implacable fate. A thirst which but one thing could quench, the sight of Richard, hurried her footsteps along the busy thoroughfares.

She held her head high, higher than usual, her mouth set in a hard smile. She could feel the muscles straining at the corners of her lips, but it seemed a matter of life and death to her that they should not tremble. She held her head high with a proud, scornful look; and yet as she passed each person, each pre-occupied bystander, the thought recurred, did they know,—could they guess her errand? The whole world to her was invested with a terrible omniscience which made her every thought and feeling plain to all observers. She looked into the eyes of strangers, seeking there and yet dreading condemnation. An exaggerated self-consciousness seized hold upon her. She wanted to turn back but it seemed impossible. Some perverse occult force drove her on. The very stones beneath her feet seemed to shriek a warning to her, yet heed it she could not. There was in her a craving for Richard as a sick man craves food.

Yet it was a terrible thing to do, to go to a man's office like this! The nearer she came to the place, which was close to the Temple buildings, the greater became her doubt. Yet she pushed it off and resolutely entered the building.

There is about those established haunts of men connected with the law, a peculiarly male atmosphere,

marking them as sacred to the sex, and causing a certain trepidation in the hearts of mere women entering therein, even when bound upon the most legitimate of business. To Gloria, coming here in defiance of all established principle, the thing was doubly alarming.

As she climbed the stairs, it seemed as if a great weight were attached to each foot. The staircase was at once incredibly long and mounted in a moment. At the door of the office itself, with its thick glass panels, she paused irresolutely. Her throat felt dry, her heart was going like a triphammer, her hand trembled. Now was the crucial moment; yet she hesitated.

A man coming down the stairs from the floor above, decided her. She couldn't stand there at the door doing nothing, as if she were listening at the keyhole. For one instant she raised her tragic eyes to the stranger. A brief hope that it might prove to be Richard died at its birth. She saw a fat man with a florid complexion and pale sandy hair, who stared at her with a quick, inquisitive gaze.

She looked away again; turned the handle of the door and went in. Suppose Richard shouldn't be there? Suppose he was there, but angry, and should turn her out? A thousand doubts assailed her, as slowly, like a condemned criminal, she entered and closed the door behind her.

The clerks seated there looked at her curiously; a hush seemed to fall upon the room. Then she heard Richard's voice in the inner office, and a great wave of relief swept over her. She sank into a chair near the door and closed her eyes for an instant. She felt faint and very tired, physically tired, as if she had been running fast for a great distance. Yet, safe within the



harbour of the sound of his voice, a great peace came over her.

A man came forward and asked her business. In a voice which trembled slightly she asked for Richard.

"I'll see. He's very busy. I'm not sure that you can see him now."

The man disappeared.

She heard Richard's voice inside say "What!" sharply. A moment later he hurried out to her. He did not ask her into his office; instead he opened the door for her and stepped with her out into the passage.

"What is it?" he asked. "Has anything happened? What do you want?"

He did not mean to be harsh and he did not know how exhausted she was with her own courage. Gloria tried to explain, but the words failed her.

"I—I had to come," was all she could say.

But Richard did not understand.

"What do you mean, you had to come?" Richard was a bit impatient. "Is anything wrong? Has anything happened?" His voice sounded incredibly cold and unsympathetic.

In her heart Gloria wished that something *had* happened. She sought vainly for an excuse. It did look silly now, her having come, and in the light of Richard's reception of her, because now that she was here within sound of his voice, within touch of his hand, the terrible loneliness was lifted from her heart. Yet she knew that she must give some reason. I must say it, she thought,—I must say it quickly! But something seemed to paralyse her throat.

"I—I wanted to see you," she said at last lamely.

"Yes, I understand that. But what for?"

"I—I just wanted to see you," Gloria repeated tremblingly.

"But you mustn't come here like this,—for no reason at all!"

Richard was a little out of patience, but he had not meant to be as brutal as he sounded. He was still grasping for an explanation of her coming. But to Gloria's ears his words sounded like the voice of doom. She swayed a little in her place and instinctively her hand caught at the wall for support. Yet Richard remained oblivious.

"I—I did want to see you about something," Gloria began again miserably, feeling that some excuse, however trivial, must be found to keep Richard from looking at her like that, with that angry scowl on his brow. "But I can't tell it to you here. Will you—will you come out with me now?"

"I can't," said Richard shortly. "I'm busy."

"Please come, Richard——"

"Do you mean that you really have something to say to me?"

Gloria was not a very good liar, but she managed to falter out, "Yes."

Richard gave her a quick look. He had noticed all at once how pale she was. "All right, I'll come. Wait for me a few minutes."

"Where,—here?"

"Yes. No, you'll want to sit down. Come inside."

They re-entered the outer office, where the clerks were bending over their books and papers. Richard pulled forward the chair by the door for her, and left her sitting there while he went back into his own sanctum.

It seemed to her that he was gone a very long time.

She felt uncomfortable where he had placed her, out in the room like this. She tried to push her chair back against the wall again and the legs made a raucous scraping, terrifying to her ears. She caught the side-long looks of the clerks bent upon her from time to time. One, an anæmic youth with a long inquisitive nose, seemed to be always raising a pair of round blue eyes above the level of his desk, the better to observe her, and instantly lowering them again when she caught him at it.

She was glad when Richard came back. He had his hat in his hand and his overcoat on his arm, and together, in silence, they descended to the street.

They had gone several paces before Richard spoke: "You're not—ill, are you?"

"No." She shook her head. "Only here," she put her hand suddenly on her heart. Now that she was here beside him she felt secretly frightened, subtly intimidated by his presence. For weeks she had dreaded that something might break,—that there would be a limit to his good nature, and she felt that she must conciliate him.

She tried to do this as they threaded their way along the crowded thoroughfare, but it was difficult under the circumstances, dodging pedestrians and the like, to make him understand her pitiful little hopes and fears and dreams. And in the end she felt that she had only partially succeeded.

As for Richard, he was frankly puzzled. What should he do with this strange wilful child? If he gave her nothing she was miserable, if he gave her much she wanted more.

With a certain deft tact, but without in any way comprehending her need, he soothed her. Although

he was in fact angry at her interference with his work and her forwardness in coming to his office, he endeavoured as much as possible to cloak his resentment; and a little later, as soon as he could do so without feeling too much of a brute, he pleaded that he must get back to his office, and parted with her with a promise to come to see her,—soon.

Immediately he had left her he ran into Sharlie Baldwin. He felt a panicky hope that she had not seen them together,—Gloria and he. But Sharlie's first words defeated that hope. She gave him a cheerful greeting and then, with a glance at Gloria's retreating figure, laughed.

"Ivy, you know,—it clings!"

Richard ground his teeth together. He did not even attempt to smile.

After all it was too late to go back to the office. He turned hastily; and, hailing a taxi, had himself driven at once to Prince's Gate.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### EPILOGUE

RICHARD came out of his office one afternoon after a day of peculiarly harassing business troubles. A client had proved obstreperous, had insisted upon having his case conducted according to his own views instead of those of the firm. Simeon, that usually calm individual, had been as nearly in a temper as Richard ever remembered to have seen him. He himself had had to stand as buffer between his irate senior partner and the irascible little man whose contempt for the law was only equalled by his insistence that every branch of it, however unsuitable, should be used in his interests and to confound his opponent. The illustrious firm which should have been as free as air in conducting such matters, found itself hampered and held back at every step by its client's combined ignorance and arrogance. Richard, as he had just remarked to Simeon, was heartily sick of the whole thing.

He was mentally repeating this remark as he stepped into the street from his office. He had not seen Gloria for several days, almost a week, in fact. He had said it was because he had been too busy. He knew that it was current gossip in the family that Gloria's devotion to himself was in excess of his desires. To a peculiarly sensitive man it is one of the most annoying reports which can be circulated, involving as it does a certain amount of ridicule. And of all things to be made ridiculous was the most obnoxious to Richard.

Never before had such a thing happened to him. Yet of late, more than once, he had been teased on the subject, publicly ridiculed, so that his heart was hot with anger. And at times it inevitably reacted against Gloria in his feeling towards her.

To-day, a little way down Fleet Street, he saw his cousin Tom Baldwin. He would have avoided him if he could. He had always disliked the man, now more than ever, but Tom had already recognised him, and rather than deliberately cut him, Richard continued on his way, a course which made it impossible for him to avoid a meeting.

Tom immediately came up and thrust his arm through Richard's.

"Hello there, old top! What ho! What's the news in the world?"

Richard denied knowledge of anything extraordinary having happened in the world at the present time. But Tom was in a fine humour and would not be put down.

"Why so gloomy?" he asked. "Aren't enough people quarrelling with their neighbours to suit your business just now?"

Again Richard shook his head, and would have moved on but Tom kept beside him.

"The gay Lothario doesn't seem to be in the best of spirits. Been walking with the little flapper lately? She's looking for you." He nudged Richard facetiously in the ribs as he spoke. "There she is!"

And down the street, half a block away, Richard saw her.

She was walking rapidly as she always did, her tense little body held straight. Her hands were held tight together in front of her breast and she looked in the

faces of the passers-by with a quick enquiring gaze. She was evidently searching for someone.

Tom nudged him again. "Look out!" he said. "She'll catch you."

Richard saw her glance into the shop windows, a comprehensive glance, and yet furtive as if it might betray her errand, and then look quickly back at the street again for fear she had missed him. An infinitely pathetic look.

How long had she been going up and down there looking for him? At Tom's first word he had shrunk back into the shadow of a doorway. Now as the space between him and Gloria lessened he glanced rapidly at Tom. The latter had turned his back for a moment, intent upon a shop window. Without a word of explanation Richard ducked down the side street. He felt that he could not meet the pathetic appeal in Gloria's eyes. Making certain, by a backward glance, that she had not seen him, he walked rapidly off in the opposite direction. But his heart was heavy. How long would she go on looking for him like that before she gave it up in despair at the last? Would Tom meet her and tell her in some offensively cruel way that she had missed him?

After that he took to avoiding her purposely. It seemed a cruel thing to do, yet he convinced himself that it was the best thing for them both. His motives were just. He had an idea, true enough, perhaps, in most cases, that if she did not see him, if they never, or at least but seldom met, and if she were once convinced that her efforts were useless, the separation would be easier. He did not even hope that she would forget. Obtuse as he sometimes was, he yet had a consciousness of how deep was her love for him. But

he thought that if she saw him only occasionally, she might grow reconciled to the fact that sooner or later they must part. What he did was from a mistaken kindness, but he did not know the terrible depth of the passion with which he had to deal. He had wondered sometimes what was this wild strange being, half child, half woman, whose love he had awakened. He had never been able to understand her or her moods,—the mixture of absurd shyness and sudden courageous boldness. They amazed and frightened him.

Nor did he know how she suffered from the attitude of others as well, the members of the family, the outsiders. Sensitive to a fault, there were times when she almost hated Richard for the slights which he put upon her. If she could only have got really to hate him! And because she loved him with a simple child-like love, she could not understand his seeming cruelty. It used to be so wonderful when they were together. It was all changed now.

Unable to bear longer the intolerable grief of not seeing him, she went again to his office. On the first time she repeated her unhappy visit there, Richard was bitterly cold and unsympathetic.

"But I've told you not to come here. Why have you done so?"

"I had to come. I couldn't stand it any longer without seeing you. It's so terrible to be always alone. You don't know what it's like. I had to come. I had to see you."

"But why come here? When you know I don't wish it. Why didn't you send for me to come to you if you had to see me?"

She looked up at him, her eyes full of tears.

"You wouldn't have come."



Richard bit his lip. He knew it was true. He would not have gone; and he wanted to tell her now that he would not come in the future. Yet he wanted terribly not to hurt her. But she was so headstrong; she wouldn't understand. He noticed that she was very thin. There was a transparent paleness about her. The homely saying came to him, "she looked as if a breath would blow her away." So frail a little thing. Her will was wearing out her body. For she was wilful. No one could hang on like this without being so.

What a tragedy! And had he contrived it? No, surely not he, but something stronger than he, something big and irresistible,—Fate!

"You must go away," he said as gently as he could. "You must go away and you must not come back here again."

She stretched out her hands in a piteous little gesture. Her lips trembled.

"I can't," she said. "I can't. You don't know what you're asking. You don't know what it's like all alone. To be alone, to eat alone."

There followed a silence, Richard looking down meditatively at the toe of his boot. He was in a horrible predicament. He was trying to think what he could say when she spoke again:

"Couldn't I sit with you here in your office a little while?" Her voice was very low and timid. "I shouldn't bother you any, and I will be very quiet."

Richard gasped. He looked at her sharply to see if she could possibly mean what she was saying. But she was not joking. Her little face was intensely serious.

Richard had a horrible thought. Suppose anyone heard or found out about this ridiculous request! He

looked hastily behind him. But no one was there to hear the simple question.

"Of course you cannot do that," he said. "The idea is absurd. But if you will go now, I will promise to come for you to-morrow afternoon and we will go somewhere together. Will that satisfy you?"

Gloria expressed herself content. It was a great thing to her, this promise of Richard's. In her simplicity she saw in it a renaissance of his love for her, and on the simple promise she builded many hopes. One idea stood out before all the others. If she could but persuade Richard to take again that wonderful walk which long ago in the golden springtime they had taken together, all would be well. All the morning she thought about it. If he would go with her to-day just once more; if they could repeat the perfect ecstasy of that other time. Alas! she was not wise enough to understand that once gone, that first rapture can never be recovered, not through all the length of years. But she did not know this.

"God grant me to-day," she whispered, "just to-day." She put her hand on her breast to still the fluttering of her heart. "God give me to-day!"

But when Richard came, a little late, it was scarcely the happy cheerful companion she had hoped for. He suggested that they sit up-stairs in her little sitting-room instead of going out, but in her disappointment she could not consent to this.

"You said we could take a walk," she reproached him. "You said we would do something together. It isn't any fun sitting here all afternoon. Please go take a walk with me, Richard."

"Well," he said at last, grudgingly. "I'll go for a very short one."

"But I—I wanted to go to those woods where we went that first day." Gloria could scarcely keep the tears out of her voice.

Richard shook his head. "Oh it's too far, a great deal too far."

The disappointment that gripped her heart at his words became unbearable. Her lips trembled and the tears came into her eyes.

"Oh please, Richard, please! Just this once."

"I tell you it's too far. I haven't the time."

Gloria sighed. "Couldn't we go just part way, Richard?"

At last he yielded and Gloria's heart bounded. The memory of their first walk together had remained a joyful oasis in the desert of her later thoughts. There was in her mind a kind of superstitious feeling that if she once brought him to that enchanted place he must inevitably be hers again. For hours past she had concentrated upon the idea, until it was all but an obsession. If she could once get him there.

But Richard, whose gait was ordinarily so brisk, moved slowly to-day, reluctantly; and Gloria, driven forward by a fear that he would change his mind before they reached their goal, lost all enjoyment of the walk. She had the mental sensation of pulling a great weight behind her. It was one of those nightmare walks filled with the dread of momentarily expected obstacles.

And when they finally reached their destination everything was somehow changed. The autumn day which had been so warm and promising in the forenoon, had grown grey and chill as they walked. A cold wind coming up out of the valley beat upon them and Richard shivered ostentatiously.

"It's too far for such a cold day," he expostulated. "We can't stay very long." He thought it was simply obstinacy on Gloria's part to want to come here to-day. He did not, he could not, sense the psychic significance to her of this belated return to the place of the birth of love.

With a little sigh of relief at having finally reached the place, Gloria threw herself down on the ground. After all, Richard had come all the way. Nothing could dim the fact that she and Richard were here again at last, although she realised, somewhat drearily, that nothing was as it had been.

It was obviously a spring walk this, not for the dull monotonies of autumn with its melancholy hint of coming rain. She looked around and the place seemed strangely altered. For a moment she could not believe it the same as the one where she and Richard had been so happy. Could it truly be the spot she had known? The dead scattered leaves, rusty and mildewed, the dun rocks which the summer foliage had hidden, bitten and scarred with time, and indented with caves and hollows where a prehistoric sea had rushed in,—the terrible inland sea. All this was different to what it had been so short a time before.

Over beyond where they had sat that far-off spring day, a tree had been uprooted, blown down in some mad frenzy of storm, the bare sinuous roots with the dirt and moss still clinging to them stuck grimly upward like tortured hands clawing at the sky. There was something gruesome in its helpless plight, and in spite of herself Gloria shivered and looked away.

Where the man had been ploughing there were only dull fields, brown and bare, whence the harvest had *long* since been gathered.

Yet despite the sombre surroundings she should have been happy here beside him,—but she wasn't. It was all so brief, so transitory. She sat beside him and the moments rushed by, haunted always with the dread of parting. The moments slipped by, dull and grey and worthless. And at last Richard rose and shook himself and said that they must return.

In the gloom of the dingy little drawing-room Gloria contemplated the day which had just passed. Her desire had come to her at last, but so notched and scarred as to be all but worthless. She could not keep back the tears.

"Don't leave me, Richard," she whispered. "Don't leave me." She had said nothing to him of her disappointed hopes.

Richard, a little tired of her incessant wail, "don't leave me," stooped and patted her shoulder.

"Poor little girl," he said.

His sudden tenderness unnerved her. She went to pieces without warning. When he had soothed her a little Richard went home, walking with his head down and cursing himself for his folly in ever having started the thing on again.

## CHAPTER XXIX

### LOVE'S NADIR

GLORIA walked slowly along the outer edge of the Green Park. Her grief weighed her down like a heavy weight attached to her heart. Instinctively she put her hand to her breast as if to still the pain. It hurt, literally hurt, weakening and enervating her like a physical nausea. She walked careless alike of the warm winter sunshine or the crowds that passed her. Her eyes saw, but her mind refused to register. Presently she turned into the park.

The warmth of the day had attracted a number of people to wander along the paths or rest on the benches, not, however, the sort of people one liked to rub shoulders with. She had seen, without noticing, the recumbent figures of several men on the grass even so late in the year as this, lying on their faces, motionless like dumb effigies of pain. She stood for a few minutes watching some sparrows quarrelling among a little heap of fallen leaves. Their shrill flutings sounded incredibly loud among the deserted benches. And yet they were not all deserted. Upon one near at hand sat a woman with a child at her breast, an ill-shod, ill-kempt woman whose sullen swollen face betrayed no emotion whatever, blurred and worn by the friction of life's currents into a smooth mask of nothingness. Now and then the emaciated atom in her arms set up a feeble crying, and she hushed it mechanically with a strident click-click of her tongue as expressionless as the ticking

of a clock. Farther on, a man and a woman sat huddled together. A whole tragedy of hopeless unemployment, and of momentary rest stolen from its uneasy contemplation, showed in their listless attitudes, in the slack shoulders and the idle hands held loosely in the lap, showed too in the apathetic gaze of the woman, and in the man staring straight before him with a kind of desperate intensity. Gloria hurried on. Why should the world send forth its outcasts and its unfortunates to tear at her heart, whose grief was already greater than she could bear?

Yet she felt tired, as if the carrying of her weight of grief were too much for her. She looked about for an empty bench on which to rest. But there was none quite vacant. Two were in sight. On one a seedy old man in a greenish black suit of clothes many times too large for him, was intently reading a grimy newspaper. On the other a dingy old woman in a nodding bonnet slumbered, her head sunk upon her breast, equally unattractive as a companion, but Gloria chose her because she appeared to be asleep. And Gloria wished to be undisturbed. Not that she had anything in particular to think about. When she tried to think her mind just went round and round to exhaustion, like a squirrel in a cage. So she sank wearily upon the seat beside the old woman, who took no notice of her presence.

She saw the light glimmering through bare trees like distorted skeletons. The air was mild and balmy, cutting her heart with the thought,—if he were here! But he was not here. He was over there, miles and miles away, across the grey roofs of London, and beside her was only a drunken old woman asleep on a park bench. What charm in the soft rays of the sun

now? It might as well be as cold and drear as the pole.

She was aroused from her revery by a husky sibilant voice in her ear, accompanied by a penetrating odour of stale alcohol. With a sense of physical distaste, Gloria looked around. The old woman was leaning towards her, the bedraggled plumes on her hat nearly sweeping Gloria's shoulder. The woman was staring at her greedily with little eyes like a pig's eyes set close together.

Gloria drew back.

"What's the matter, dearie?"

The woman was repeating her initial enquiry. "You've got some trouble, ain't you? Oh I know, I can tell."

Gloria's eyes widened. She stared stupefied at the woman.

"Ferget it, dearie," the creature cautioned her; "don't you let a man hurt you like that. They ain't worth it, not the whole b——bunch of 'em. Ferget it, I say. Give 'im the go-by."

And still Gloria stared. She wanted to get up and go away, but she was very young,—it seemed a rude thing to do. Besides something in the woman's gaze held her against her will. She was absurd, a grotesque thing with her little pig's eyes and the dingy bonnet with its ridiculous nodding plumes. She looked like something made up for the stage. Gloria moved back again along the bench, striving to keep the distance between them, but the woman only edged nearer. She shook her head again, leaning forward so that the swaying feathers of her hat all but brushed Gloria's cheek.

"Don't you do it, dearie. You listen to me. Men



are all alike. Law bless me! you think they're different when you're young. I did meself once. But they're all alike, every mother's son of 'em. And when they treat you bad there's only one way to deal with 'em. Just one way, that's all."

She paused and Gloria, in spite of her repugnance, could not help asking, "What's that?"

"Ferget about 'em, that's all. Ain't I tellin' ye."

"But—but suppose you can't—" Gloria faltered.

"Can't! Nonsense." The old woman shook with stifled laughter, and again Gloria was aware of the unpleasant odour of alcohol. She was looking down, meditating on how to make her escape, when she heard the woman speaking again, this time close to her ear. Her voice sounded somehow more intense than before.

"There's only one sure way to drive out the thought of a man, dearie, and that's to take another in his place." Her little eyes leered at the girl, who continued to gaze at her much as a bird, hypnotised, gazes at a snake. "And don't you ever trust any man again. Sooner or later they'll leave you in the lurch unless you leave them first. They can't help it. They may mean no 'arm, the poor dears, but they can't help it. It's the way they're made. I know, dearie." She nodded her head sagely. "If your young man's runnin' after some other girl don't you go about thinkin' you can cure 'im. Cure yourself by gettin' someone else in his place. That's my advice."

A moment later she was nodding again. Gloria rose softly, but the old woman heard her and opened one beady little eye.

"Goin', dearie? Well, remember wot I've told you. That's good advice I give you. You'd like to be payin' for it, I expect? A little somethin' just to wet me

whistle with? I ain't had a drop for months. I'm that dry! Just a little somethin', dearie? You'll thank me some day for the words I give you."

Gloria fumbled in her purse and found a shilling. Anything, she thought, to get away from this horrible old woman.

"Here, take this."

The woman's greedy little eyes brightened.

"I know'd you was generous as soon's I see you. I sez to meself, 'there's a little lady if ever I sees one,'— I sez——"

Gloria hurried off, leaving the old woman still nodding her head and muttering. She hurried past the seedy-looking man, who raised his bleary eyes from his paper for an instant to watch her curiously and then resumed his reading. The couple together on the bench, and the woman with the child had all gone, but Gloria did not notice. She hurried on out of the park.

## CHAPTER XXX

### NEW FACES

IT was during Gloria's lowest state of despair that she met Sharlie Baldwin in Bond Street one morning. Gloria was staring into a shop window, not from any interest in its contents,—she had been past the window a dozen times already, but because from a distance she had seen a man go into this particular shop, a man who strongly resembled Richard. She didn't really think it was he, but she must make sure. Strange how many men in London looked like Richard in these days, especially if they were just beyond reach.

He seemed to be always eluding her. A dozen times she had been mistaken. She would walk down the street and suddenly she would seem to see him just beyond. Fearing, dreading to lose him again in the crowd or in some building, she would hurry on, sometimes breaking into a run, trying not to take her eyes from the figure ahead, and yet in terror that someone she knew was watching her.

So intent was she to-day on her search, that Sharlie had to tap her on the shoulder to attract her attention.

"Well," Sharlie cried glibly, "what's interesting you so much that you can't see your friends and relations when they pass by?"

As the window before them was only full of bags and walking-sticks, Gloria looked rather foolish. Whether it was her momentary confusion, or that, perhaps, Sharlie guessed something of her intense and

utter loneliness from Gloria's white and drawn face, it is certain that Sharlie was, for the moment, touched. She was at heart kindly and she had been lonely herself more than once, although she hid it successfully under the hard brilliance of her manner; so on a sudden impulse she extended an invitation to Gloria. Some people were coming over to tea at her flat that afternoon. Wouldn't Gloria come too. It would do her good to meet new people. There were several rather interesting minor lions expected among the guests. "No Baldwins," she added as an afterthought.

Gloria coloured slightly, but Sharlie had meant nothing by her remark except to tell her that the party was to be one of those frowned upon, and perhaps secretly envied, by the majority of the great clan Baldwin, those arch-conventionalists. Yet her remark troubled Gloria, and for a time she determined not to go.

Afternoon, however, brought long hours which had to be got through somehow. In her little room Gloria debated with herself, languid and uncertain, walking to the window and back.

In the end she went.

At Sharlie's flat the party was in full swing long before Gloria arrived. She was late, because she had been so undecided whether to come or not, and because later, when she finally reached the house, she had walked up and down for several minutes trying to get up her courage to go in, somewhat fearful of making a conspicuous entrance, and dreading a little the ordeal of meeting so many strange people.

She need not, however, have worried much on that score. Very few of the guests took any notice of her whatever. They seemed to Gloria, upon first entering, to be holding a contest to determine which could

talk the loudest and fastest. The women were for the most part older than she had expected. The majority looked to be thirty or more. Most of them had bobbed hair and incongruously hard faces. Gloria felt unusually shy. She regretted intensely having come. Her thoughts were still full of Richard. It might have been her own listless attitude, but it seemed to her that the gaiety here was somewhat forced. And she could not help feeling that her presence, even while they more or less ignored it, had acted, in some mysterious way, as a blight on their enjoyment. She did not belong here, that was the truth of the matter.

She was casting about in her mind how she could decently make her escape when a tall grey-haired man took her in a kindly way under his wing. He had been watching her for some time from the opposite side of the room, with an odd half-humorous gaze which was at the same time peculiarly penetrating. He rose now and came to her side.

"Will those quarrelsome young men give me a chance to talk with you?"

Gloria looked at him fearlessly, straight in his eyes as she always did with strangers. His voice, rich and full, touched her with a momentary interest. He was older than the other people here; she judged him to be over fifty. The grey hair stood up from his high forehead in a crisp wave; the brown eyes, faintly mocking, wore a kindly look. She knew his name, Arthur Garnier (Sharlie had tried to introduce her to them all), and that he was an artist, rather well known in certain circles. The son of a German mother, he had been born and brought up in that country, but except for a very slight accent, scarcely more than a gentle burr, he appeared completely Anglicised. A long residence in

England cleared him of any reproach of disloyalty, although he had spent the difficult years of the war travelling in America and Japan, only returning to England at its conclusion. He was, she knew an authority on things Japanese. It was on the subject of his collection of prints from that country that he talked to her when, having drifted somewhat away from the others, they sat together in a distant window-seat.

"But you must see my collection. It includes examples of many noted artists," and he ran over a list of names which sounded impressive but which meant little or nothing to his hearer. Gloria listened because it was easier doing that than trying to make conversation with the others, or endeavouring to form a part of that central group where everyone seemed to be talking at once.

So she sat apart with Arthur Garnier the rest of the afternoon. It was perhaps a compliment that he should have singled her out, for he was at once a celebrated man and one who was looked upon in London as a connoisseur of women. Sharlie, indeed, took time to whisper to her facetiously:

"Mind your step! He's a terrible man with the ladies!"

The others left them to themselves.

As she left the party Sharlie gave her a cordial invitation to come whenever she liked to the studio. It wasn't a bad place to "park" for an afternoon, she said in her easy-going slang. There were books and things.

"Whenever you have time, come in. It doesn't make any difference whether we're here or not, Jane and I. Just help yourself to whatever you want. I'll tell them down below to look out for you. The door's never locked, or if it is the key is under the mat.

"And if you should feel like painting, there's always an extra easel lying about. Just do whatever you like. A good many people drop in here in that way. It's what I love about studio life,—no formality, no false pride, no petty conventions!"

Gloria thanked her. She had not thought at the time that she would take advantage of the invitation. She was not happy. She saw less and less of Richard. What good would a studio do?

But there were also times when life hung so heavily on her hands that she must needs welcome any source of relief. Matters with Richard did not improve; so that in time she came to be glad of Sharlie's careless invitation. The big studio was a kind of haven set there, high above the surrounding multitudes. From its windows she could look down into the gardens of the old hospital, or out over hundreds of roofs towards the great teeming city. Those windows were her favourite places of rest. She was standing here one day when Sharlie, who had been watching her unobserved for some time, spoke. Sharlie was painting; she had not stopped on Gloria's arrival. It was the chief charm of the place to Gloria that the others went about their work regardless of visitors. At times, perhaps, when her mood was too unbearably melancholy, she would have preferred a slight amount of attention, but on the whole she liked to be left alone. It made it easier to escape stupid questions when they didn't talk. To-day however, Sharlie said:

"You don't seem very happy, Gloria. What's the matter? Is there something on your mind?"

Gloria turned and looked at her. She knew that Sharlie knew,—that all the world knew, what was the matter with her. Even Richard had told her what they

were saying. Yet she did not feel any resentment against Sharlie for having asked. She felt too unutterably weary to be resentful.

"Oh it's just life, I suppose," was all the reply she made.

"But what's the matter with life?" Sharlie pursued. "What have you got against it?"

Gloria looked back out of the window to the quiet hospital grounds below.

"Oh I don't know," she said. "Only it all seems such a damned rotten waste."

Sharlie felt a little quiver of pain at her heart. It was what she had thought sometimes. Gloria's words expressed the very mood which she had oftenest to try to combat, which she most dreaded, for Sharlie was an optimist by training rather than by nature. So she spoke quickly to cover her momentary lapse.

"But you mustn't think of life like that. It's ridiculously false. Quite the wrong view to take. Besides," and Sharlie meant casually to inculcate a bit of worldly wisdom, "if you've any idea of keeping a man fond of you, *that's* not the way to go about it. No, you must be cheerful, you must be optimistic, you must be bright."

She was painting steadily as she spoke, for she didn't want to embarrass Gloria while she advised her. Sharlie was not a prude, and she felt that Gloria ought to have a chance with her lover if she wished it. And she was genuinely sorry for the little girl, since everyone appeared to be turning their backs on her.

"Yes," she repeated, "you must be bright."

Gloria, who had started at her words, turned back again to the window. "Bright!" and the heart in her like a heavy load of lead!



"Oh my God!" she said very softly.

She had felt when she left the studio that day that she would not go back. Yet she did go one day in the course of the next week. Sharlie was out and Jane, she knew, was in Paris. But the woman down-stairs, whom Gloria found sweeping out the lower hall, urged her to go up.

"It's what they like to have their friends do. Just you go up, dearie, and make yourself at home. They'll be back before long—at least Miss Sharlie will. The other, she's gone away again. Always on the go, she is. But Miss Sharlie'd be quite disappointed for you to go away again after you've come. Do go up, dearie, and wait for her."

So Gloria went up. It was really rather a relief to find the place tenantless. She wandered around the studio for a few minutes and finally took up her favourite position in the big window-seat. Sharlie's table was always covered with the latest magazines and papers but to-day these failed to interest her.

She was leaning far out of the window oblivious to the pleasant gardens below, where a couple of old men were slowly pacing up and down, but gazing at the miles of grey roofs, and wondering down which of those narrow clefts which marked where ran the city streets, Richard was at this moment walking. Why could she never find him? Why was the luck never with her as it used to be, so that she could meet him, so that their steps could sometimes come together? Surely it was a little thing to ask. A very little thing for God to do.

She had been for some time leaning out, lost in her own dreams, when suddenly she was recalled to the present by the sound of a voice behind her, a rich and

beautifully modulated voice. She hastily drew in her head.

"I beg your pardon! I thought it might be either Miss Longman or Miss Baldwin."

Gloria turned. It was Mr. Garnier who stood there bareheaded, his crisp grey curls standing up from his head, his shoulders slightly stooping as he towered in the narrow doorway. Then as if suddenly recognising the figure at the window:

"But it is a Miss Baldwin, after all, is it not? The others, they are not here? You keep house alone then?" He advanced a little way into the room and then paused. "But am I interrupting you? Or may I come in?"

Gloria made a hasty gesture of welcome. She was in truth glad to see the man. Her thoughts were wearisome; it was someone to talk to at least. And besides, this particular man's voice thrilled her in a subtle, rather interesting way. There had been something not altogether unpleasant in the slight feeling of uneasiness which he had roused in her when they met before. There was a desolation in her heart, a kind of not caring, that accentuated the effect he produced. She had eaten no lunch and she felt just a touch light-headed.

She was about to move away from the window when he stayed her with a gesture.

"You look so pretty standing there against the light. There, just that way. Don't turn any further. That is charming."

He advanced and stood close to her looking down at her with an inscrutable expression, half amused, half questioning. His fingers played delicately with the tiny enamelled locket hanging at her breast. And quite

suddenly she became aware of the fact that he was going to kiss her.

"You don't know how pretty you look."

She saw his face bending nearer and nearer.

"Oh, but you are very lovely."

A kind of apathy seized her, in which appeared dimly the remembrance of how cruel Richard had been lately. Would he care if this other man kissed her?

She saw his face close to her own and marked the flat German nose and how coarse the smooth skin looked, seen close like this. The touch of his flesh as he pressed his cheek to hers was cold and viscous,—like putty. Yet she turned her lips deliberately to his.

Was it a kind of punishment for her folly in loving Richard? She was saying to herself "I don't care. It doesn't matter. Nothing matters if Richard won't love me any more. It doesn't matter what I do or whom I kiss." So in the shelter of the studio she gave him her lips to touch with those thick curly ones of his.

It mattered little to her that she knew him to be an accomplished lover, known all through London for his Lotharian tendencies. There was in the deed a little thrill because she had been kissed by few men, but over it all she was coldly conscious. Never had Arthur Garnier made a less involuntary conquest.

Sharlie, when she returned, found them having tea together with muffins and hot water which Gloria had prepared on the spirit-lamp.

## CHAPTER XXXI

### THE END OF THE ROAD

THERE came a day when Gloria's need for Richard turned to madness. She hurried to Prince's Gate. Scarcely noticing Martha, who opened the door for her, she ran rapidly up the stairs to the drawing-room.

She opened the drawing-room door. There were several people there, but not the one she sought.

"Where's Richard?" she asked abruptly.

It was Irene who coloured. Hildegarde, who was present, told them all about it next day when Mrs. John and Mrs. Matthew came to Gloucester Terrace for their usual afternoon of tea and gossip. "She flew in like a whirlwind," she announced, "demanding Richard, just demanding him, there's no other word for it."

"Poor child," said Aunt Letty softly to herself. In the universal abhorrence in which Gloria's conduct was held, hers was the only expression of sympathy. And Aunt Letty, while she was kind and gentle, was not at all likely to influence anyone. Her sympathy therefore passed unnoticed.

But in spite of her daring, Gloria had not found Richard that day nor the next. On the day following, Gloria called at the office only to be refused.

Old Adams, the confidential clerk, came in to Richard to announce her. Richard bent over the table to hide his chagrin.

"Tell her I'm not in," he said in muffled tones.

Old Adams, who had heard the stories about his master, but who yet hated to disappoint the little girl who seemed so desperately to want to see him, lingered a moment, shifting from one foot to the other and hoping the order might be changed or recalled. But Richard said nothing more, so he had perforce to do as he was bid.

From the window, hidden behind the heavy curtains, Richard watched her departure. He noted the discouraged little droop of her shoulders. With a dull pain in his heart he followed her progress to the corner of the street, where she stood waiting, uncertain which way to go. She was wearing a little cape which the wind, whistling down through Fleet Street, tossed about. She looked very small and pathetic as she stood there undecided, trying to find some reason for turning one way or another, the little blue cape fluttering.

Richard sighed and went back to work.

But those who deal with injustice develop a certain craft almost in spite of themselves. When at last, through what was almost a trick, Gloria found Richard at home and unprotected, she made her appeal, a pathetic little speech of broken sentences, her tears kept back by force of will.

And on Richard grew the conviction that he must be obdurate. The more she talked the more sure he became of that. He turned a deaf ear to all her appeals. She put out her hands at last, trying to clasp them round his neck.

"Don't hang on me," said Richard petulantly.

She stopped then, looking at him in a dazed sort of way, her hands pressed against her bosom. Richard had not meant to be brutal, but he wanted to convince her of the uselessness of what she was doing.

"Do you mean that you don't care—for me any more?"

But Richard could not answer this question.

"Do you mean that it's all over between us?" she asked again.

"Yes," he said, summoning all his courage to the task, "that's just what I mean."

So then she left him.

## CHAPTER XXXII

### NOCTURNE

GLORIA's eyes were searching for a number among the thickly-clustered buildings along Sloane Street.

"I live over a millinery shop," Arthur Garnier had said. Ah, here it was.

A row of flaunting bonnets filled the plate-glass windows before her. Gloria stared at them for a brief moment. They all looked horribly ugly.

A doorway beside the shop led into a narrow vestibule where a call board with bells indicated the various apartments of the lodgers. Beside the last bell, just as he had told her it would be, there was no card. Gloria pushed open the inner door into the stair hall.

A flight of steps covered with a dark oilcloth led the way to the upper regions. With a little catch in her throat, Gloria mounted. She took the first flight rapidly, as if wanting to get it over. "On the top floor," he had said.

On the second floor two doors with ground glass panels, evidently the entrances to shops, faced her. One bore the inscription: "Towers, Gowns." There came no sound from behind their opaque panels. Gloria passed up the second flight.

Here the transition from the merely commercial to living-quarters was marked by a dingy red carpet taking the place of the ubiquitous oilcloth. Here there were three doors in exactly the same location as the others, but painted white. Gloria's speed slackened somewhat, for the steps were steep; but from behind one of the

doors now facing her there came the sounds of mild gaiety and the smell of food cooking. Some bohemian supper-party evidently. She hurried on lest someone should inadvertently look out and see her.

But at the top of the next flight, where the hall seemed to be in darkness, she sat down to rest. Her heart was going like a triphammer. It would be all right to stop here, for anyone coming up into the glare below could not see her in the darkness above, and she could make her escape upward if they came beyond the lighted hall.

And now doubts began to assail her. Suppose after all he shouldn't be in? The sounds of merriment coming up from below increased her feeling of loneliness. Why, after all, had she come? Arthur Garnier had asked her to come, but she didn't believe he really expected her. And she was so very tired of not being expected and of missing people. Melancholy began to grow on her.

The sound of a door closing somewhere started her to her feet. One more flight to mount. She won the top landing.

Here a dim gas-jet was burning, and there were only two doors. No one lived here but himself, he had said. She knocked at the entrance door but there was no response. He was not home.

Gloria went back to the stair-head. She felt very weak and tired. What should she do? Go home again? The thought of the drear empty room in Chapel Street terrified her. Wait for him here? He was sure to come in time.

She decided upon the latter course, and for a time she stood leaning against the wall and watching the



flicker of the gas-jet on the paper. But she felt restless, and the monotony of silently waiting irritated her. Perhaps the bell down-stairs did work, after all. Perhaps he was in there all the time and had not heard her. It might be worth while to try the bell down below once more.

She toiled down the long flights and rang again several times. She could hear nothing, but that was not to be wondered at. She arrived breathless at the top landing again, only to find things exactly as they were before, except that it seemed somehow darker and more lonely.

Resignedly she sat down on the top step to wait. The stairs all made a slight turn at the top, so that from her post she could see all the way down the well. The front part of the hall was not in sight; she could only see when someone started up the lowest flight. She waited.

The hall door opened several times, and the flat scuffle of feet on the oilcloth covering warned her of the approach of each entrant. Then she would look down. The minutes passed. A belated reveller came to the party down-stairs and was greeted with hilarious shouts which turned to a dull hum abruptly, as soon as the door was closed behind him, as if the shouters had been suddenly choked.

A messenger boy with a package came to the floor below her and left his bundle at one of the doors. Gloria had sprung to her feet in terror as he came on up flight after flight, fearing that his destination might be the top floor and there was no other outlet save the roof. Crouched against the wall, she waited until he had disappeared into the cavernous depths below stairs before resuming her place by the banisters.

How unutterably quiet it was now! There was something eerie in these tiers of deserted halls, and the straining her eyes to see down below was making her dizzy. Gloria had just about given it up and was contemplating a descent herself, when the street door opened for the last time.

She heard his steps first swishing on the oilcloth and later muffled by the carpet coming nearer and nearer, like the footsteps of Fate, even before she saw him. Through the banisters she watched his slow ascent, the flat black hat which he affected giving him a strangely squashed look seen like this from above.

As he reached the foot of the last flight, she rose to meet him. He exhibited not the slightest surprise at finding her there waiting for him. He unlocked the door and together they entered his rooms.

He reached up to the switch on the wall and immediately the place was flooded with light. She had a brief instant's glimpse of things Japanese about the walls, hangings and prints, a tall carved tortoiseshell comb lying on a table with the prongs towards her and an ugly Chinese god grimacing at her from a niche in the opposite wall. Then Arthur Garnier held out his arms to her and drew her over the threshold.

Against the darkness of his breast, somewhere miles and miles away, she heard the door close behind her.

## CHAPTER XXXIII

### THE LAST PILGRIMAGE

It was on a day in late December that Gloria made her last pilgrimage to Richard's office. She climbed the weary flight of steps with a vague sense of the utter futility of all things earthly. Yet to-day she had come with a definite purpose.

Old Adams went in to Richard to announce her. He appeared a trifle nervous.

"It's the young lady, Sir. Will you see her? I've already told her you are in, Sir." This he said in order to forestall a refusal on Richard's part, for old Adams, thanks to a long experience with the adverse knocks of fortune, could read the suffering in faces, and there was that in Gloria's to-day which moved him to compassion.

In the outer office Gloria sat as she had sat that first day, her hands tightly clasped in her lap waiting for old Adams's return. She looked at the clerks, and again found them covertly watching her from behind their books. But now she didn't care. She didn't care about anything.

Adams returned and said that Richard would see her in his private office. She followed the old man meekly. As he went out, closing the door behind her, the old man shook his head. This was a sad case, a sad case!

And standing in the private office before Richard, like a criminal before the bar, Gloria made her con-

fession. Arthur Garnier,—a visit to his rooms,—probably it didn't matter since Richard didn't care.

He sprang to his feet and caught her roughly by the shoulders.

"You're lying!"

She looked in his eyes. She said nothing but he knew then that it was the truth. And he turned away.

So Gloria went out again from the private office which had been so long forbidden her, out past the clerks who lifted curious heads as she passed, out of the outer office ignoring old Adams's discretely muttered farewell, and out again into the sombre streets; leaden-eyed, dull, despairing.

She walked along Fleet Street and the Strand, the little smile which had become a habit just curving her lips, and that vague half questioning, half frowning look of wonder on her brow seen sometimes on the faces of children asleep or in young soldiers killed in battle. Her head was held high, but her shoulders drooped mournfully. So she walked all the way back to the West End.

She did not know that for a long time after she had gone Richard still sat with his arms stretched out across the table and his head buried in his arms.

## CHAPTER XXXIV

### VALE

THE winter set in fierce and cold, with days and nights of sudden frosts followed by an interregnum of springlike calm. And Gloria Baldwin went her way unnoted of the Baldwins. Occasionally one or another of them, in family conclave, reported having run across her; but they were only the ordinary encounters of London life and far between. Flora told of having met her in Regent's Park and Philip Hartley of having seen her at the Empire, and on both occasions it was added that she had been accompanied by "that dreadful Garnier man."

Sharlie, when approached on the subject, shrugged her shoulders. It was a pity, of course, but then, what would you? Sharlie, being strictly virtuous herself, "took it out," as the saying is, by affecting a nonchalance on the subject of morals (as applied to other people). It went with the artistic atmosphere of Chelsea. Yes, it was quite true that she had met him at Sharlie's flat. But what of that? It would doubtless have happened anyway. Sharlie didn't see how she could be blamed. She had only meant to do her best for the poor little thing, to give her a good time when all the others failed her. She looked significantly at Irene, who was present when she said this.

Of course she couldn't have been expected to foresee the consequences. She had, indeed, even taken the trouble to warn Gloria of Garnier's reputation. But then Garnier was really so distressingly fascinating.

There were some in the family, however, who believed Sharlie's rather damning excuses too severe, in spite of the liberality of her morals. Aunt Letty, for instance, clung to her faith in woman's inner goodness. Tom, on the other hand, told his wife confidentially that the little devil had quite gone to the bad.

Out of consideration for Richard, they were all silent in his presence. Yet, with the uncanny instinct of the much-discussed, he knew that they were talking. He would have liked to find out from Irene what it was they were all saying, but somehow he could not bring himself to talk about Gloria to Irene. And he clung tenaciously to the belief that Gloria was forgetting him.

And then gradually they all forgot her. Like a nine days wonder Gloria had burst upon their cognisance, and afterward, little by little, she had receded.

The winter came, chilly and bleak. Frost gleamed on the windows; the biting air froze the breath on one's lips. And on a day which seemed too morose and cold even for the snow to venture out, Fate at last again put her hand on the wheel.

About nine o'clock in the evening Aunt Letty sent around a note to Richard. He and Irene were out, dining with the Hartleys, so the note was placed on the hall table to await their return. Martha had been told that she need not wait up for them.

It was one o'clock before Richard and Irene returned, and as the light in the hall was dim and no mail was expected at that hour, the letter remained unnoticed until morning. It lay there face up through the long hours of darkness.

Irene did not come down to breakfast and Richard, who had slept badly, was somewhat behind his own

time. In a hurry to get to his office, where he had an important conference (an interesting trial point having come up in one of his cases), he failed, contrary to custom, to look at the hall table on his way out. It was only after his departure that Martha discovered the neglected letter and took it up on the tray with Irene's breakfast.

Irene, after glancing casually at it (she guessed from the handwriting that it was from Aunt Letty), laid it back on the tray unopened. She had no petty weaknesses; curiosity did not play a very important part in her nature, and judging it to be on the subject of the trouble Aunt Letty was having,—or thought she was having,—with the builders next door at Gloucester Terrace, who, in the course of remodelling a house, were in danger of spoiling Aunt Letty's, she decided that the note was not of immediate importance. So she sent it down again with instructions that Martha was not to fail to put it beside Richard's place at table, in case he should happen to come home to lunch.

Richard, however, remained in the City, as he quite often did, so the letter was put back on the hall table once more. Richard found it there on his return from the office at about four o'clock in the afternoon.

He read it standing, still clad in his overcoat and galoshes,—for it was beginning to snow gently outside.

"Dear Richard": the letter ran. "Can you make it convenient to come across the park to-night? I think you ought to be here. It may seem an odd request, but I wish you could do so. Gloria came to us yesterday. She was looking distressingly pale and thin, and was in a strangely excited state. I took her temperature and there was fever. So I put her to bed in the spare room.

"Hildegarde is preparing to go away. I don't like taking all the responsibility, and there isn't anyone else I can ask. Besides, she calls for you. She has been delirious since the morning. The doctor thinks it quite serious. She says your name over and over,—it is quite pitiful to hear her. Come if you can. Your affectionate aunt, Letitia Bancroft."

Richard stood for several minutes with the letter in his hand. He was so still that no one knew he had entered the house.

At last he rang for Martha.

"When did this letter come?"

"A boy brought it last night."

"Late?"

"No, not very long after you left, Sir."

"Why didn't you send it on to me?"

Martha stared at the white face of her master. Its look of condemnation annoyed her. She knew all about him and his goings-on! So she returned his gaze, regarding him uppishly, with a certain "keep-to-your-own-side-of-the-fence" expression. In words she said:

"I wasn't to know it was so important, Mr. Baldwin. The boy said nothing about there being any hurry."

"No, I suppose you didn't," agreed Richard wearily, as he turned away.

"Will that be all, sir?"

"Yes. I shall be going out again. And Martha! say nothing to your mistress of my having been home, do you understand?"

The woman looked at him with level brows,—a knowing look.

"No, sir."

"She is out now, isn't she?"



"Yes, sir. She has gone to a Child's Welfare Meeting."

"When she comes in,—unless she asks about it, say nothing of my having gone out again, will you please?"

With a fleeting upward motion of her eyebrows, the woman bowed and retired.

He knew that Letty would not have sent for him unless it was something serious. Yet he dared not think. Letty had sent for him,—that was all the fact that he would let his mind entertain. And with collar hunched up, feeling like a thief in the night, Richard went.

It was a long walk across the park. The snow swirled and flew in little eddies at his feet, and along the deserted paths with their thin mantling of white, no ghost of a footprint showed. Right or left, before or behind him, there was not a soul in sight.

The early winter dusk, thick and white like a curtain, descended upon him as he walked. Near the gate on the north side, he paused and looked back. An orange-coloured glow, faint and tenuous, showed in the West. Lights, seemingly immeasurable distances away, flickered at the other side of the park. Pale ghost-lights they seemed, seen through the mist of falling snow,—wavering, mocking.

Why he paused and took that backward look, Richard could not quite explain. He was in no mood merely to admire the pale Whistler-like scene; although its mysterious beauty, the half light not yet altogether gone from the sky, the cool crisp dampness, subconsciously touched him. A moment more and he hurried on lost in his own gloomy reflections.

The portico of the house in Gloucester Terrace looked somehow strange to him, almost unfamiliar, as

if it had undergone some mysterious transformation during the night. Yet he knew it to be the same doorway that he had known all his life.

He sprang up the short flight of steps and was quickly inside. Aunt Letty met him in the lower hall.

"So you've come at last!"

Instinctively they avoided each other's eyes. Richard stood in the little dark hall fumbling with his hat.

"Yes. I didn't get your message until a few minutes ago. We were out to dinner last night, Irene and I, and the maid neglected to give it to me this morning."

"I see." Aunt Letty led the way, and in silence they mounted the narrow staircase. Richard glanced into the empty drawing-room.

"You're all alone?"

Aunt Letty nodded. "Hildegarde's gone to stay with Stella for a time. We—I—that is, she thought she might be in the way here. We didn't know then, of course, that it would be for such a short time."

A pause.

"It's over then?" Richard tried to control the quaver in his voice, but it shook in spite of him.

Again Aunt Letty nodded. "Early this morning." And she added in a matter-of-fact voice: "She spoke your name several times. She kept calling for you in the delirium."

"She—she called for me?" Richard repeated the words rather humbly with downcast eyes.

Aunt Letty's face worked slightly, the muscles at the sides of her mouth drawing it down on either side in ugly lines. She put up her hand to hide this emotion. Impossible for one Baldwin to unbend before another. It was her duty to let Richard know every-

thing, but she nevertheless disapproved of any weakness.

"Do you think she wanted me, Aunt Letty?"

The old woman met his eyes for a moment and shook her head in the affirmative. She did not yet trust herself to speak.

"And to think I was there, just across the park and didn't know——"

Aunt Letty looked studiously out of the window as she waited for Richard to speak again. The silence was longer than he meant it to be before Richard said: "I'd like to go to her."

Without more ado Aunt Letty led the way to an upper chamber. A frail gaslight illuminated the room. Underneath the window, which had been left partially open, a little film of snow had collected. The tiny flakes fluttered in silently.

Richard stood in the doorway. He was still in his overcoat. He looked somehow much older. His eyes, dry and hot, searched the room in a quick restless gaze.

On the bed in the far corner a thin little figure was outlined under the close-drawn sheet. Richard slowly crossed the room and stood beside the bed, staring down at it. Aunt Letty, who had disappeared for a moment, returned carrying a small lamp which she placed on the table at the head of the bed. Aunt Letty drew back the sheet and then she too stood with her hands clasped in front of her, gazing at the bed. There was no sound in the room save the rhythmic ticking of the clock on the mantelpiece and the uncertain flapping of the curtain at the open window. And Gloria lay there beneath their steady gaze, a little thin and drawn, yet so like her usual self that the sheet seemed to move as if with her breath. And there was

still on her face that little look of half-frowning wonder. Like herself, only so quiet, that little intense body that so loved colour and light and sound!

Richard looked at the delicate mouth with its short imperious upper lip, at the delicate hair curling outward over the little ears, but it was the hands that touched him most. They lay upon her breast white and soft and virginal, but alas! now so quiet. He remembered them suddenly stretched out to him in a poignant gesture,—little hands so ready, so eager to give, so pitiful, so tragic! They seemed, lying there on her breast, an epitome of herself, proud and fearless and defiant, and yet very pitiful.

Aunt Letty stirred restlessly beside him, and Richard suddenly remembered her presence.

"You say she died this morning?"

"Yes. Very early. It was just when the tide changed. I looked it up in the almanac, to make sure. It's odd how often that happens. I had heard it many times but I didn't really believe it. It was funny it should have been so in Gloria's case—" She tried to laugh a little and her voice broke harshly, suddenly.

"The others,—Simeon, Peter,—have any of them been here yet?"

Aunt Letty shook her head. "I sent for you first. I wanted to wait for you to come before the others did. I thought Gloria would wish it. That you should see her first."

Richard felt a quick appreciation of her delicacy.

Aunt Letty went on explaining. "It was influenza, you know. What they call the 'Flu.' The doctor said from the first that there was very little chance."

"Yes, I know." Richard turned his gaze again to

the bed. His mind reverted to what Letty had said,—that she had sent for him first, and he was glad. He looked at Gloria. He knew now that she could never have given him up,—never. He had been a fool, but it was plain to him now. And he knew, too, that whatever she might have done with that little flower-like body, she was still his,—his at heart, his in spite of everything. Yet he would never take the insatiate little lips again——

There was a choking sound in his throat and all at once the room and the bed and the white figure upon it became blurred. And suddenly Richard *knew!*

He saw now that it was not only Gloria who was lying there so white and still, but something else,—his own youth. His golden foolish youth!

He took a step nearer and a torrent of memories flooded his mind, memories in which Gloria herself could have no part. Recollections of other days, sweet luscious joys forgotten in the whirl of time. The faces of long neglected school fellows rose before him in mute farewell. Farewell! Farewell! It was being whispered through the quiet room, it was in the flapping of the slack curtain at the window and in the breeze that just lifted a strand of Gloria's curling hair. Farewell forever!

He knew that he would go out from this room another man, an older man. He knew that he would go back across the dim snow-covered park, back to Irene's calm eyes, and Irene's quiet smile, to her love and a great and terrible peace. But something was gone; the youth, the romance, the thrill of life,—these would be buried forever.

Again that choking sound in his throat, and Richard dropped to his knees by the side of the bed.

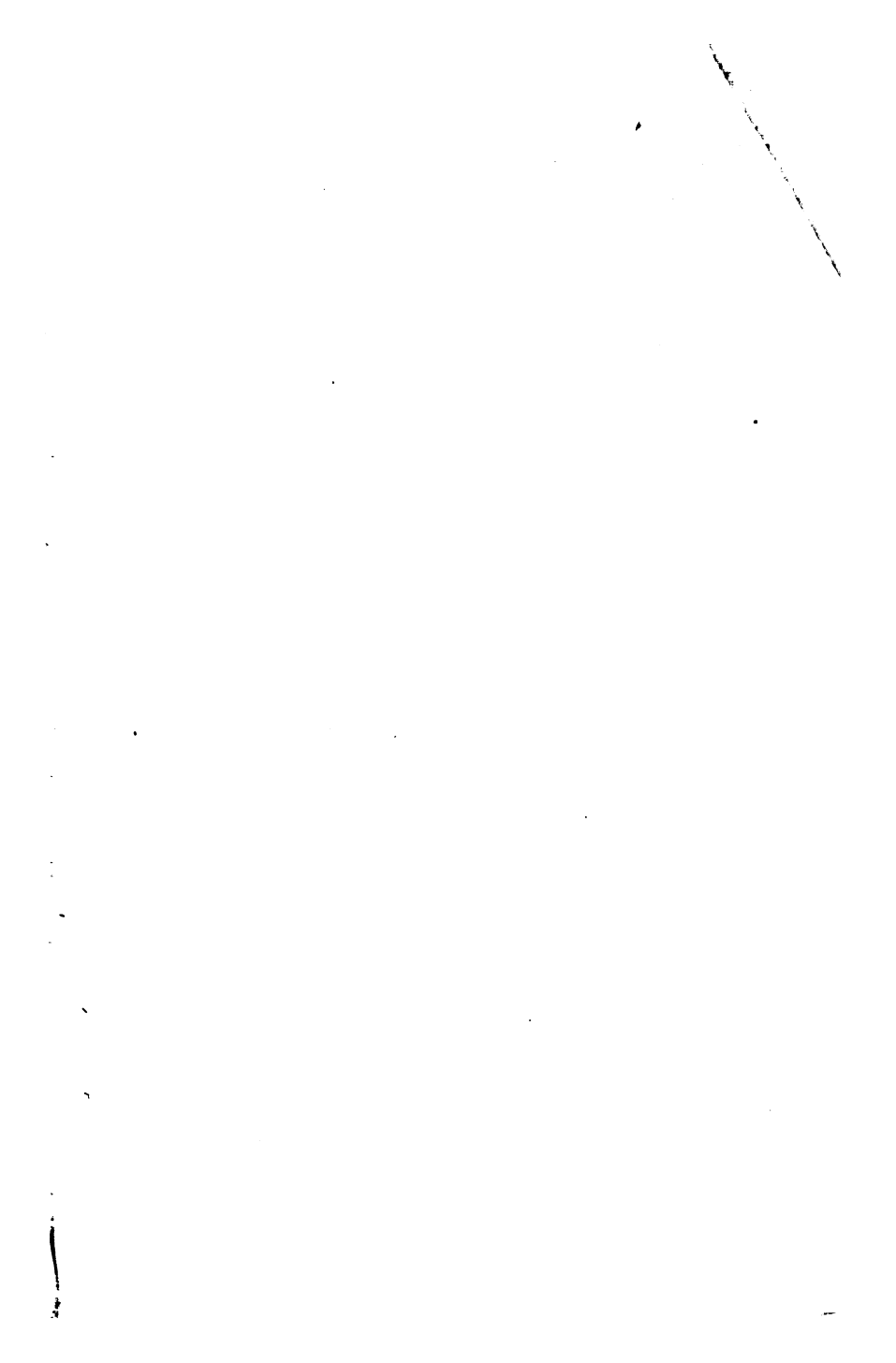
Leaving the lamp shining dimly on the table, Aunt Letty went out very quietly, closing the door behind her, and left him alone with the dead.

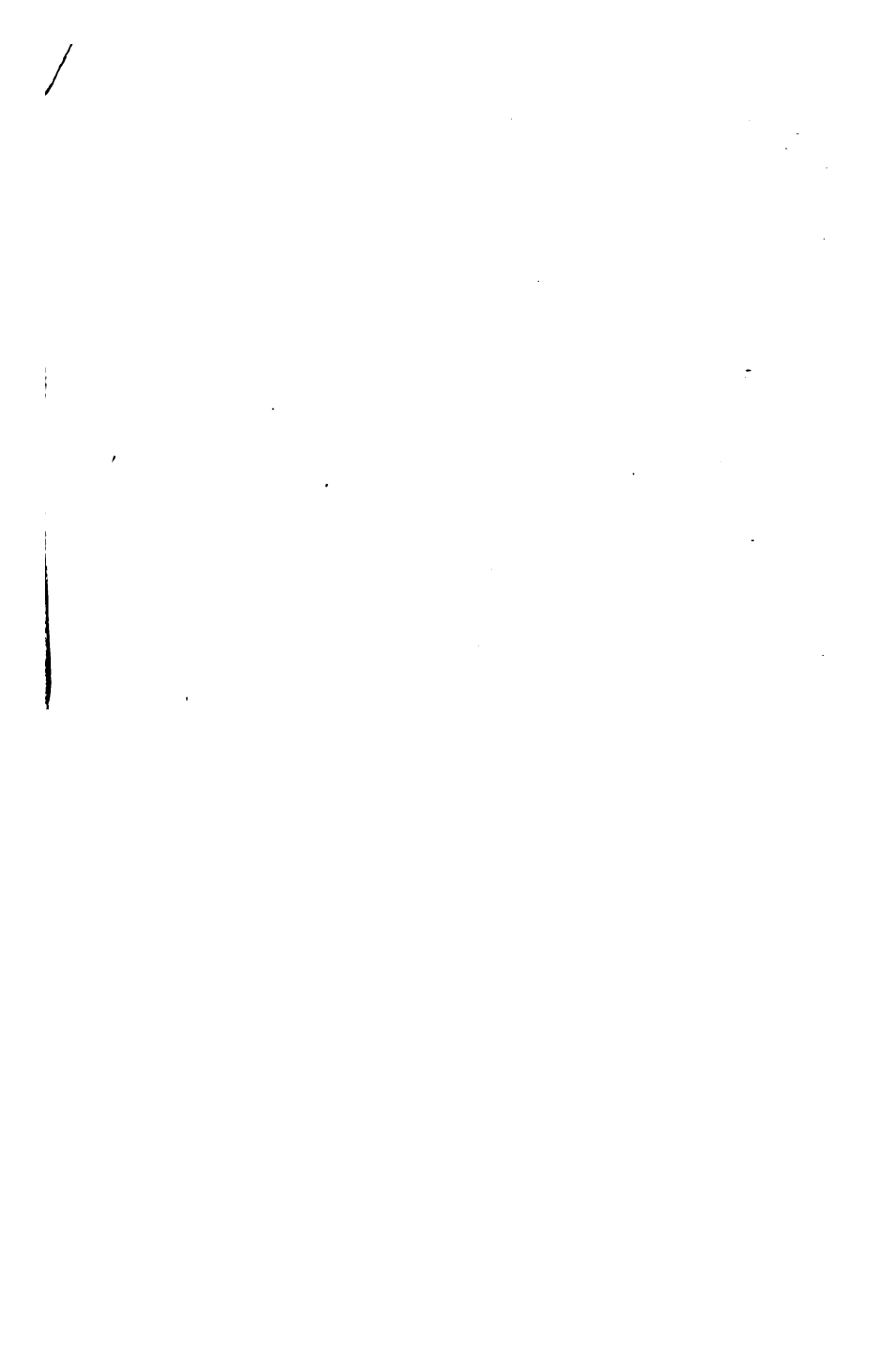
THE END











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